PROFILES

ARCHITECT

I—YOU'RE LUCKY IF YOU CAN COME CLOSE

IN July, 1926, the League of Nations, having decided to build itself a palace in Geneva, invited all the architects in the countries constituting its far-flung membership to submit designs for such a structure, in a competition to be judged by an international committee of experts in the field. By January, 1927, when the competition closed, three hundred and seventy-seven architects had submitted some ten thousand designs. The judges then held a series of meetings in an attempt to come to a unanimous agreement on the best plan. During their first sixty-four sessions, they were unable to reach a decision, although a plan submitted by Charles Le Corbusier, the French functionalist, regularly received more votes than any other. At the sixty-fifth session, Le Corbusier's plan was disqualified, on the technicality, perhaps politically inspired, that it had been drawn in printer's ink, and not in China ink, as the terms of the competition had stipulated. Then the judges went on to proclaim nine architects (including, paradoxically, Le Corbusier) co-winners of the contest, confused things a little more by announcing that none of their plans would be used, and wound up by handing what had become a very hot potato indeed to a committee of five supposedly experienced diplomats, who hardly lived up to their advance billing by first selecting a team of experts to advise them, then rejecting their advice, and, in the end, hand-picking four architects, not including Le Corbusier, to collaborate on an entirely new design for the palace. The building, an antiseptically conservative one that nobody was happy about, was finally opened in September, 1934—seven years after the wrangle began. Since the League's dispiriting failure to get its own house in order, to say nothing of the world's, is still vivid in the minds of statesmen on both sides of the Atlantic, a good many of them feel that the most spectacular feature of the permanent headquarters of the United Nations, on the East River, is that the members of its international board of design—seventeen architects, from fifteen countries, among them two Russians, a Brazilian Communist, and the controversial Le Corbusier—unanimously arrived at a plan in four months and in a rare state of harmony. The major credit for this achievement is generally accorded to the leadership of the American architect Wallace Kirkman Harrison as chairman of the board of design and director of planning for the United Nations headquarters. Under Harrison's direction, the three buildings that constitute the headquarters were up and ready for occupancy just four years and one month after ground was broken for the first of them. Their total cost exceeded by only two and a half million dollars the original appropriation of sixty-five million—a considerable feat in view of the fact that the price of building materials rose about twenty per cent during the period of construction.

Wallace Harrison

A hearty, intense, strong-featured New Englander of fifty-nine, who stands a bulky six feet two, shambles like a small-town mailman, and, whether he is talking English, French, or Spanish, still speaks in the undefiled accents of his native Massachusetts, Harrison, up until he achieved his recent celebrity as the U.N.'s architect-in-chief, was largely unknown outside architectural circles, although over the past quarter of a century he has been a partner in firms that have built some seven hundred million dollars' worth of assorted structures. Among these are all but one of the fifteen components of Rockefeller Center; the Trylon and Perisphere at the New York World's Fair, in Flushing Meadow; the Hunter College building on Park Avenue; the African Habitat, at the New York Zoological Park; additions to the Bush Building, in London; submarine and air bases for the United States Navy, at Coco Solo, in the Canal Zone; the remodelled Lenthéric store, on Fifth Avenue; a batch of garages for New York City's Department of Sanitation; the Hotel Avila, in Caracas; the Eastchester housing development, in the Bronx; Oberlin College's auditorium; the Republic National Bank Building, in Dallas; the United States embassies in Havana and Rio de Janeiro; and two office buildings that went up not long ago in Pittsburgh—one, thirty-nine stories high, for the Mellon Bank and the United States Steel Corporation, and the other, thirty stories high, for the Aluminum Company of America.

Much in the pattern of those recurrent Marquand characters who, though saturated with integrity, are nevertheless constantly fretful about not having enough of it, Harrison is careful whenever he is singled out for admiration as the fellow who built the U.N. to call attention to at least a dozen of the specialists who were associated with him on the project, but at the same time he insists on accepting full responsibility whenever the buildings are criticized. And there has been plenty of criticism, for no other contemporary architectural enterprise has provoked such extreme differences of opinion as the United Nations headquarters group—the Secretariat Building, the Conference Building, and the General Assembly Building. Those in favor have called the most prominent building in the group—the slab-shaped Secretariat—"a masterly example of the power of architecture to express monumentality" and "a triumph of unadorned proportion," and one of them has referred to the group as a whole as nothing less than "a segment of man's dreams made visible." Those opposed have been equally eloquent. They have denounced the Secretariat as, among other things, "a sandwich on end," "a sinister emblem of world power," and "a bop-sized TV screen that no one can dig," and the entire setup as "a colossal botch," "a spiritual cipher," and "a collection of clichés from the dead past and the dead present." Harrison has managed to parry most of these thrusts gracefully, but in the case of a prolonged attack by Lewis Mumford, a critic for whom he has great respect, he has periodically shown signs of feeling the sting. Even so, he has managed to keep his equanimity. Shortly after Mumford publicly declared that if the United Nations succeeded in be-

"Alfred! What happened to the Crusade?"

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coming an effective organization for world government, it would be in spite of, and not because of, the architecture of its permanent headquarters, the editor of the Sunday *Times* book-review section sent Harrison a pre-publication copy of a book edited by Mumford, "Roots of Contemporary American Architecture," along with a letter asking him if he would care to review it. Harrison's secretary of many years' standing, Mrs. Bernadette O'Toole, put these on his desk, adding a note of her own at the foot of the letter: "Everything comes to him who waits." Harrison's first impulse was to send the book back for somebody else to review, because he was afraid that he could not be objective about it, but he changed his mind when he read it that night, and the next morning, pacing his office like an angry moose, he dictated a long, slashing diatribe. Mrs. O'Toole read it back to him. "O.K.," Harrison said crisply. "That's perfect. Now tear it up." He then sat down and dictated a rather generous review.

IN a profession studded with gaudily iridescent temperaments, Harrison's basic restraint and stability give him a curious individuality. They also help to explain his success. "In this world, you can find all the brilliant minds you want, but the Wally Harrisons –brilliant people who are also completely reliable – are a rare commodity," Beardsley Ruml, a friend of Harrison's who is a connoisseur of commerce rather than of architecture, said recently. "Wally can get along with people, a wide variety of people. For another thing, he understands money and has a sense of responsibility about it. On top of this, he's a clearheaded administrator, so capable that he was able to run the Office of Inter-American Affairs toward the end of the war. You can work with Wally Harrison." In the judgment of Nelson Rockefeller, Harrison's only true eccentricity is his independence. Harrison and Rockefeller, who have been close friends for over twenty years, first met in the embryonic days of Rockefeller Center, with which they were concerned as a young architect and a young son, respectively. "The first time I became aware of Wally," Rockefeller has recalled, "was the day I went along with Father when he met with the seven architects who were designing the Center to talk over how the exterior of the R.C.A. Building should be handled. Well, Father was accustomed to buildings that had fluted columns or Gothic arches marching up their sides, and he was outlining his ideas on that subject. The architects all listened until Father had finished, and then Wally exploded. 'Goddam it, Mr. Rockefeller, you can't do that!' he said. 'You'll ruin the building if you cover up its lines with that classical gingerbread.' Mind you, Wally was the youngest of the architects present, and it would have been easy for him to have played it safe."

Harrison's reputation as a man of incorruptible principle towers so high that it tends to obscure his considerable creative powers. As an architect, he belongs to no school or movement. "Perhaps you might call him a perpetual progressive," says Max Abramovitz, his partner in the firm of Harrison & Abramovitz. "The question Wally is always asking himself and everybody else is 'Where do we go from here?' He's always searching for a better design to express the function of a building. He's always on the lookout for new materials that will make new designs practicable." By way of corroborating this statement,

Abramovitz cites the fact that the Secretariat was the first building in the world to have windows made of heat-resistant glass; it started the present vogue for exteriors that give the effect of being a single huge window. Harrison is inclined to minimize the independent streak that others see in him. "There's no building that isn't designed by the client," he says. "The amount of beauty an architect can achieve is always limited by the amount of imagination and feeling for beauty the client has in *his* system. Most clients haven't got much, or else what they have is buried deep beneath their conservative commercial instincts. Here's the way it figures most of the time: In the designing stage, when you're trying to interest the client in a new idea, he thinks you're a crackpot. Say it's a new kind of door. The client won't touch it unless you can take him over to some building that's already up and show him a door exactly like it. Then, when the client finally gets into his own building and you've given him the door he asked for and nothing new he can boast about, you're just a no-good, lousy carpenter." In the case of the Aluminum Company of America, however, Harrison & Abramovitz had a client who was far from reluctant about going along with them on at least one phase of experimental design—an exploration of the various possible uses of aluminum in construction—and in consequence, the Alcoa Building, in Pittsburgh, is undoubtedly one of the most revolutionary office buildings of the past two decades; not only its ceilings, stairs, window frames, air-conditioning equipment, lighting fixtures, piping, and hardware are made of aluminum, but even its exterior walls. According to the Alcoa people, it weighs less than any other building of its size in the world and may well be the most weatherproof.

Along with his standing as an expert on tall, trim, down-to-their-fighting-weight office buildings, Harrison is also preëminent in a field that at first might seem to be an altogether antithetical aspect of architecture. Over the past quarter of a century, the firms he has been associated with have led the way in paying more than the customary lip service to the view that architecture should embrace painting and sculpture as kindred arts. Calder, Archipenko, Gabo, Léger, Noguchi, Lachaise, Manship, Ozenfant, Rivera, and Callery are a few of the well-known painters and sculptors Harrison has commissioned to ornament his buildings. His enthusiasm for modern art would appear to be simply a triumph of exposure to it for thirty-five years ago, when, as a young Yankee, he found himself in the wilderness of Paris, he couldn't see the stuff at all. Now, having overcome his prejudice to the point where he paints a pretty [illegible]gmatic abstract himself from time to time, and finds a Calder mobile called "Snowfall" a restful note in his bedroom, he is out to convert others, and often sends mobiles and extremely modern paintings to Midwestern businessmen he has had dealings with, asking them to live with the pieces for a while and see if they don't find them as comfortable as an old pair of flannels. A few years ago, in a rather similar missionary mood, Harrison tucked a fine Picasso under his arm and paid a call on Trygve Lie, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, to discuss the interior decoration of the organization's new headquarters. After a brief preamble in which he explained how, to his mind, Picasso's work embodied the aesthetic qualities the new buildings should express, Harrison uncovered the painting with a flourish and stepped back to admire it. "Just imagine," he said reverently. "Picasso painted that in one day and thought nothing of it!" "Neither do I," Lie responded shortly. There are no Picassos at the U.N.

Harrison surrounds himself with contemporary art at home. He and his wife, the former Ellen Hunt Milton, have a six-room, fifth-floor apartment on Fifth Avenue, in the Sixties, which is so filled with modern paintings they have bought, with copies of Légers painted by Mrs. Harrison, and with Picassos that the Harrisons' friends have lent them that it might almost be taken for an uptown branch of the Museum of Modern Art. Much as Harrison admires this setting, however, he finds that he can both enjoy himself and work better at a year-round country house he owns at Huntington, Long Island, where most of the time he dresses in a T-shirt and a soiled pair of trousers held up by a rope belt. This house is forever reminding visitors that it is the shoemaker's son who wears sneakers, for it is a seemingly aimless hodgepodge of three buildings, and, looking at it, one finds it hard to believe that its owner has designed a dozen or more beautiful private houses for other people. The first of the three constituent buildings of the Huntington house to go up was a rectangular one made of aluminum sheeting. Designed by Kocher & Fry, it was the principal attraction at an architectural exhibition that was held in Grand Central Palace in 1934; when the exhibition was over, no one could think what to do with the house, so Harrison bought it, for fifteen hundred dollars, and had it lugged to a sixteen-acre piece of property he owned in Huntington, where it was reassembled. Dadaistic, if anything, in design, "the tin house," as the Harrisons have always called it, offers such conveniences as an exposed drainpipe that runs down from an upstairs bathroom into the center of the living room, where it becomes one of the legs of a built-in dining table and then disappears into the floor. This house proved to be icy in winter and torrid in summer, and after struggling along with it for a couple of years Harrison built on a four-room cottagelike wing, made of Transite and wood, which, while not very handsome, is at least habitable. In 1939, he added "the new living room"—a vast, modern, circular thing, thirty feet in diameter and fifteen feet high, with white cement-block walls, on which Mrs. Harrison has painted a mural copied from a design by Léger. While this triple-scoop concoction occasionally shakes the faith of prospective clients the first time they see it, it is home to Harrison, and sooner or later they learn to put up with it.

Compared to Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and several of his other prominent fellow-architects, who have a penchant for Olympian comment on all topics and a weakness for turning any tête-à-tête into a filibuster, Harrison is a quiet man. In his own way, though, he can be fairly eloquent. Preoccupied with the realization that most people never achieve all they aspire to, he has a way of thinking and talking about the average man in sympathetic diminutives—sometimes as "the little fellow next door," sometimes as "the hard-pressed little bastard," but usually as just "the little guy." (These expressions, as Harrison uses them, convey a feeling quite the opposite of that other sympathetic diminutive, "the little man," as it was used so patronizingly a few years back.) When the little guy gets on Harrison's mind, it is hard to get him off. One morning not long ago, he was kicking around the philosophy of his profession with a young architectural graduate of the Yale School of Fine Arts, who had come to see him at his office, in the International Building, in Rockefeller Center, when he received an urgent call from Abramovitz. Excusing himself, Harrison joined his partner in a conference room, where the two worked out some revisions in the windbracing for

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a new building their firm is designing—the Socony-Vacuum Building, which is to cover the entire block bounded by Third and Lexington Avenues and Forty-first and Forty-second Streets. Harrison returned to his visitor some twenty minutes later. "And that's the crux of it," he said immediately, speaking as offhandedly as if he had never left the office. "Should the temple be on the hill, or should you walk down to it? All through history, man has put most of his public buildings up on the hill, to give them an air of size and scope. It can be dangerous. Most of the time, the building takes on an impersonal feeling. The little guy goes up the hill to it less and less frequently, and after a while he has no connection with it at all. The building becomes an inanimate symbol of authority. All right, we know that's lousy, so we'll build the temple in the market place. But is it going to have the dignity down there that the little guy wants it to have? After all, he wants something he can look up to and put his faith in. It's quite a problem. Where the hell *do* we build it?"

Confronted by some of the less metaphysical aspects of his profession, Harrison often grows equally concerned. "Each time you set out on a new building, you try to make it as nearly perfect as possible," he said one day last spring to a group of friends with whom he was having an after-work drink in a bar near his office. "You know it won't *be* perfect. You're lucky if you can come close. I think maybe we did come close with Rockefeller Center. Some of its buildings are twenty years old now, but they have every major facility the newest buildings have except air-conditioning, which is something no one knew much about when we designed them. In any event, you make your mistakes and you try to profit from them the next time. I remember when my wife and I were in Italy a few summers ago, looking at everything by Michelangelo that we could find, and we came on his 'Pietà.' It's a really bad piece of sculpture, no two ways about it. Stack it up alongside the 'David' or some of his things in the Sistine Chapel, and it has no meaning, no guts at all. You feel a little better when you discover that even the greatest artist in history could botch a job now and then." Harrison took his ball-point drawing pen from his pocket and reached for a paper napkin. "I think it helps to work in America," he went on, doodling odd geometric shapes on the napkin. "There's something about this country that makes you realize you can't build a perfect building; you'd get laughed at if you thought you could. This country has a priceless quality we only half recognize. Americans are always trying to do something new, but with a sense of balance. We're sort of a halfway post between radicalism and reaction. And we work hard. You go at your job and you know you're bound to make your quota of errors, and you also know that if by any chance you happen to produce something that's pretty damn good, it's only because you kept working at it. But that's always been the story. The great men always worked their heads off. Like Bach, with all those kids, who had to compose an oratorio every Sunday for his church. He never sat down and said, 'I feel like composing something inspired today.' He didn't have the time to think whether or not he was improvising on a theme by Palestrina, or what he was trying to do. It wasn't all pure, but on his good days it was something wonderful he was doing." Harrison turned the napkin over and attacked the clean side. "Whatever you do, you can't stand still. My father was a hell of a good guy. He lost out because he thought everything was perfect Worcester, the Elks, the foundry that he worked in and that was set up along the old lines, as if the workers were craftsmen. I saw it as a kid. And I saw him rolled over by the modern factory. No matter what the cost is, you've got to move forward."

HARRISON was born in Worcester in 1895, the only child of James and Rachel Kirkman Harrison. The Harrison and Kirkman families both originated in Yorkshire. The Kirkmans had been engravers as far back as anyone knew; they took the English industrial revolution in their stride by engraving the rollers that stamped prints on the cotton fabrics manufactured in the mills of Yorkshire and Lancashire. The Harrisons had followed various trades. James Harrison started as a molder in a Worcester iron foundry and rose to be superintendent of Rice & Barton & Fales, a combination foundry and machine shop. Young Harrison grew up at a time when the pleasures of the classic Twain-Riley American boyhood had not yet quite vanished from the fringes of Eastern cities. "Where we lived in Worcester, you couldn't tell the streets from the fields," Harrison has recalled. "It was a fine life. We fooled around with all the sports in their seasons. We made skis out of old hockey sticks. In the summers, we swam, and fished for pickerel and perch in Coe's Pond." When Harrison was fourteen, his mother died unexpectedly. "I just can't describe what a blow that was to my father and me," Harrison says. "I know I lived with my father for a while after that, but whether it was three months or a year, I really have no idea. I guess you would say I was in a state of prolonged shock. All I knew was that I had to do something and do it quick. I was a freshman in high school at the time, and I decided the best thing to do would be to leave school and get a job. A friend of my family's knew a contractor named O. W. Norcross, who had an opening for an office boy, at five dollars a week. That's how I got into architecture—I needed work. After a while, my father left Worcester and started moving from job to job, so I went to room with the head office boy—a chap named Harry Winchester. Harry and I would get up at six-thirty, rush to eat breakfast, rush to see who could get to the office first—push, hustle, and compete all day. Then we'd rush home and stick our feet up on the stove and see who could get the most out of books, with Harry always a step ahead of me." After Harrison had been with Norcross for two years, his salary was raised to nine dollars a week, and around that time he also got his first architectural training, when he was assigned to draw some diagrams that would indicate to a stonecutter the size and shape of the stones he should supply for an architrave the molded frame around a door or window. Four years after starting work, Harrison left Norcross to join the Worcester architectural firm of Frost & Chamberlain as a junior draftsman. While there, he enrolled for a series of night courses in structural engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, egged on by a restlessness that found its objective when an imposing modern office building designed by a New York firm went up on the edge of Worcester Common. "It was that building that made it plain to me where I wanted to be with the people who did that sort of work," Harrison says. "When I switched from Norcross to Frost & Chamberlain, I thought I'd find out the reasons things were done the way they were. At Norcross, no one could tell me why an architrave had to be one-sixth the width of the opening. That was the way architraves were done, they looked best that way that was all they could tell me. And when I asked at Frost & Chamberlain how the proportions of an architrave had been determined, they'd tell me that those were the proportions prescribed by McIntire or by some book on architectural

standards. That didn't satisfy me, either. Surely, I figured, there were better reasons for doing or not doing a thing a certain way."

In the summer of 1916, when Harrison was twenty and had saved up thirty-five dollars, he came to New York and moved into a rooming house on West Twenty-third Street. Unencumbered by letters of introduction, he walked into the offices of McKim, Mead & White, the most famous architectural firm in the country at the time, and succeeded in getting an interview with its chief designer, William Mitchell Kendall. "Kendall told me there were no openings for draftsmen," Harrison says. "So I asked him if he'd let me work for nothing. That's youth for you—I had only about twenty dollars left in my pocket. Anyhow, Kendall told me to come back in a day or two, and when I did, he put me to work helping a man get up a book of drawings of hospitals. A couple of weeks later, they hired me at twenty a week."

Since American schools of architecture at that time were rather rickety institutions, Harrison, on the advice of some of his associates at McKim, Mead & White, began attending an atelier for architects directed by Harvey Wiley Corbett. There were three ateliers in New York in those days; one of the others was directed by Frederic C. Hirons and the third was conducted as an adjunct of the Columbia University School of Architecture. These ateliers had been established about twenty years earlier by a number of American architects who had imported the idea from Paris after studying there at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, which since the seventeenth century had been acknowledged to be the world center of architectural thought. The first Parisian ateliers were set up by groups of wealthy students who disliked the idea of attending lectures with the rank and file at inconvenient hours, and, instead, hired a loft and paid some winner of the Beaux-Arts' Grand Prix to serve as their *maître*. Over the years, atelier life became severely disciplined and developed an atmosphere about as gay as that at an Officer Candidate School, and the same came to be true of the ateliers in New York. The membership consisted of the *nouveaux* and the *anciens*, the latter being upperclassmen who had been in the atelier two years or more and were supposed to be already partially endowed with the wisdom of the *maître*. Assisting the *maître* was the *massier*—an upperclassman elected by his fellow-*anciens*—who had dictatorial powers over the *nouveaux*, and submitted them to the sort of hazing that is common to student life everywhere. Meanwhile, everyone would collaborate feverishly on some architectural *projet*—the plans and specifications for a Loire château, perhaps, or for a railroad station. Whatever the limitations of this inbred system may have been, atelier life encouraged a hardy *esprit de corps*, it gave the members lasting lessons in architectural design, and, transplanted to this country, it provided students with a much better working background than they could hope to pick up at any of the domestic schools.

Upon enrolling as a *nouveau* in Corbett's atelier, Harrison found himself the slave of a gruelling schedule. He would finish work at McKim's at five, grab a bite to eat at a quick-lunch counter, and show up by five-thirty at the atelier, which was on West Thirty-sixth Street, on the fourth floor of the building occupied by Keen's Chop House. There he would spend three or four hours at his drawing board, along with the other students, who were either graduates of architectural schools or, like him, draftsmen intent on developing their skill. Corbett, a lean, talkative Californian, preached the doctrine that architecture must have thrill and appeal, but as he made his way from drawing board to drawing board, criticizing the work of the students, he emphasized that it must also provide space and convenience. "He was the first person to give me the answers I'd been looking for," Harrison says. "He taught us the why of things, and if there wasn't any good reason for things being as tradition ruled they should be, he said so. You couldn't get that kind of answer at McKim's. McKim, Mead & White were the best—and the end—of the Renaissance. The firm stopped there. In McKim buildings like the Morgan Library and the University Club, you get the Italians' richness of surface and their modifications of the Greek proportions. That was what McKim's style was, really—a catalogue of the strong points of the great Renaissance Italians. Say you were designing a private building and were going to provide it with an elaborate hedge of trees, shrubbery, and flowers. At McKim's, you would always be referred to the hedges Lippi did for the Villa Medici. It was taken for granted that Lippi's dimensions were the best dimensions for hedges. Corbett's approach was different. I used to walk home from the atelier with him, and he'd spout away on the good and bad aspects of the buildings we passed. He'd point to the columns McKim's did for Penn Station, for instance, and explain that the firm had narrowed the spaces between them at each end of the building to give it the illusion of sturdiness. But Corbett thought it was carrying the Renaissance much too far to make taxicabs swerve between pillars to get in and out of the station. Other evenings, we'd walk over to Grand Central, and Corbett would point out why he thought its plan was superior to Penn Station's. Whitney Warren, the architect of Grand Central, provided more entrances, of course, and placed them in such a way that traffic moves in and out of the station more easily."

Harrison had been following this tight routine for about three months when, at the suggestion of his minister in Worcester, an old friend with whom he had kept up a correspondence, he moved from his Twenty-third Street rooming house to the parish house of the Calvary Episcopal Church, then at 104 East Twenty-second Street. He found the change much to his liking. "The young curates were a great bunch, full of pep and interested in everything," he says. "There was lively talk at every meal. Living there made me realize that there were other kinds of riches besides those of my monastical architectural world."

THE United States was drawing near to war. As a young man of military age, Harrison signed up for a weekly class in navigation at Columbia and became a member of the Naval Coastal Defense Reserve. His turn came in July, 1917, when he was called to active duty as a quartermaster second class. Soon afterward, he was commissioned an ensign and assigned to Submarine Chaser-80 as second-in-command to Lieutenant Walter Blumenthal, a member of the New York banking family, who was then two years out of Yale. A wooden ship, a hundred and ten feet long, with a fifteen-foot beam, and capable of ten knots (assuming there was a stiff following wind), the SC-80 astounded its two young officers by crossing the Atlantic without serious mishap and was then assigned to the Otranto Barrage. This was the name given to an operation in which thirty-six American, French, and English vessels, most of them no speedier than the SC-80, patrolled the Strait of Otranto, a forty-five-mile strip between Cape Linguetta, in Albania, and the tip of the heel of Italy, in an effort to prevent Austrian submarines based at Fiume, four hundred miles north, from

breaking out of the Adriatic into the Mediterranean. The flotilla put on a surprisingly good show, sinking two subs for sure and scoring thirteen probables, and in the end further distinguished itself by intercepting on its radio the Austrian plea for an armistice. The SC-80 was thereupon ordered to proceed to Cattaro, on the Dalmatian coast, where its two officers were empowered to act as the American representatives at the armistice talks until more experienced men could be summoned to take over. Blumenthal and Harrison lived high off the *kebab* during the two months they spent in Cattaro, and Harrison found the assignment so pleasant that although he doesn't ordinarily care for souvenirs, he still keeps a square of blue, white, and red striped oilcloth that was part of one of the earliest flags of the nation of Yugoslavia, which was born at the armistice conference.

In February, thanks to the limitations of the SC-80, Harrison got his first glimpse of Paris. United States Naval Headquarters for the Mediterranean, at Malta, feared that the wintry Atlantic would be too much for the pint-sized subchaser, and ordered the ship to wait until spring before attempting the home crossing. While hibernating, the SC-80 put into Marseille for a week, which enabled Harrison to go up to Paris on a four-day leave. He spent most of his time there studying the workings of the Beaux-Arts, and returned to his ship determined to become a student at the school as soon as possible. "I could see that it was absolutely necessary for me to go there for an education," Harrison says. "For the first time in my life, I wasn't broke. I'd saved up over a thousand dollars in the Navy. The only catch would be getting into the Beaux-Arts. The admission exam has always been pretty brutal. In my day, it lasted twelve hours, and you had to make a grade of seventy to pass. Most of the candidates spent six months in a preparatory atelier before they took the exam. Apparently, the object of the school was to see not how many students it could get but how few."

With the coming of spring, the SC-80 crawled back across the Atlantic, and on July 19, 1919, Harrison was discharged. For the next couple of months, he bolstered his Navy savings by working at McKim's, and attended some mathematics classes at Columbia in preparation for the Beaux-Arts examination. In October, he went to Paris, took the examination, passed it comfortably, found himself a cheap room on the Rue Jacob and a cheap restaurant specializing in bean soup, and settled down to a year of study in an atelier presided over by Gustave Umbdenstock. "Boy, we were serious about our opinions in those days!" Harrison says. "I remember getting all steamed up at a café one night and breaking my glass of wine as I slammed it down on the table to drive home some point I was making about closet space. I was sort of a traditionalist in those days. Even such a moderate innovation as using large glass windows on the ground floor of a building made no sense to me, because it gave me the feeling the building didn't have sufficient support. I gradually learned to appreciate what the revolutionaries like Mies van der Rohe, Gropius, and Le Corbusier were getting at, and, of course, they were right about many important matters, including some of their criticisms of the Beaux-Arts. You can overrefine and oversystematize the life out of anything, and Beaux-Arts thinking had a tendency to do just that. Still, it seems to me the modernists went too far in their wholesale censuring of the approach the Beaux-Arts stood for. Now, you take old Umbdenstock. He was a hell of a guy, one of those old-timers with the authentic rational spirit that's peculiar to a certain type of Frenchman—a type, incidentally, that's getting rarer and rarer. He must have been over sixty then, a gruff old fellow with a shaggy Clemenceau mustache. At the atelier, he always wore an old, dented derby. He'd walk around the studio—there were about thirty of us—and rip us apart, one by one. He'd just scare you to death. Then he'd talk about balance and imbalance, and the qualities of *poché* in a plan. That was Umbdenstock's big word: *poché*, *poché*, *poché*—the reason and order that lie behind even the most minute phases of planning. You find *poché* in the Paris Opera House and the Bibliothèque Nationale—the best buildings that Beaux-Arts architects ever produced. There's something to the Beaux-Arts approach, too. You really can't dismiss all traditional building with glib avant-garde phrases."

Back in New York after his year at the Beaux-Arts, Harrison worked for a few months with McKim and then got a job as a draftsman with a firm headed by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. The next year, he won a Rotch Traveling Scholarship, offered to architects who have either studied or practiced in Massachusetts, and with this he spent a few more months at the Beaux-Arts and toured various centers of ancient culture, examining their architectural wonders at first hand and pondering what they had to offer a contemporary designer. He made five principal stops, after picking out in advance one building, or ruin of a building, that he especially wanted to study at each of them: in Egypt, the temple of Luxor, the most complete of the remains of the colossal buildings that once stood on the plains of Thebes; in Athens, the Propylaea, the colonnaded gateway to the Acropolis; in Syria, the temple group at Baalbek, which his friends had raved about—and rightly, he decided—as the ultimate in Roman grandeur; in Arles, the Church of St. Trophime, whose twelfth-century Romanesque portico Goodhue adapted for St. Bartholomew's, in New York; and in Chartres, the Gothic cathedral. Harrison camped at each of these sites for six or eight weeks, soaking in the building's atmosphere, clambering over the structure from top to bottom, checking its dimensions with a measuring tape, sketching its ornamental details, and making elaborate drawings of it from every angle. He originally intended to give this same full treatment to St. Sofia, in Constantinople, but when he got there, the mosque left him cold, and he didn't even bother to take his measuring tape out of his pocket.

The trip made an enduring impression on the young pilgrim. Although Harrison has never translated any period structure as literally as Goodhue translated the portico of St. Trophime, he has frequently adapted ancient ideas to modern uses. Twenty-nine years after studying the temple of Luxor, for example, he borrowed from the Egyptians in devising a method of lighting the Corning Glass Works' display center, in Corning, New York. "The Corning people wanted a setup in which they could show off their wares effectively to the visiting public," Harrison says. "In the building we worked out for them, the visitor walks from one display room into another, and from one kind of light into another. The key is the dramatic handling of light, and no one has ever improved on the Egyptians in that department. The architect of a temple like Luxor was out to work on the eye of the beholder, like Cinerama—trying to stagger you with contrasts, and doing it. At Luxor, you begin by walking down a double row of lions with intermittent patches of light. Then the architect plops you into a courtyard flooded with that blinding Egyptian sunlight. You walk across that courtyard—it's as big as the Piazza of St. Mark's—and enter a hall, a closed arcade of columns, each sixty feet high

and ten feet in diameter, with a faint light sifting down among them from the clerestory windows. You walk through this hall for quite a while—just how long a time you probably have no idea—and a feeling of awe and of separation from life rises inside you. You emerge into another courtyard—another rectangle of harsh sunlight—and then move forward into a sombre, shut-in passageway, and this grows narrower and darker until, suddenly, you're there, standing in the holy of holies—a pitch-black room with one minute shaft of light, like a spotlight, streaking through a six-inch hole in the granite ceiling and picking up the climax, which is the figure of the Cat God."

RETURNING to New York in 1922, Harrison rejoined the Goodhue firm. Goodhue was a conscientious idealist who treated his employees like self-respecting guildsmen, allowing them lunch hours of Gothic proportions, so that if they wished, they could take in an art exhibit or some similar cultural liqueur before returning to the office; he even went so far as to have his staff present an annual Twelfth-night play, following the custom in the building trade during the Middle Ages. As an architect, Goodhue did not think primarily in terms of style; his position, when he took one, was roughly midway between that of McKim's, with its devotion to the cinquecento, and that of the young functionalist extremists, who wanted to tear down Paris, Rome, and even Stonehenge, and rebuild them from the ground up with proper fenestration. "Goodhue was an eclectic, and that's supposed to be the most damning word in the lexicon of the modernists," Harrison says. "But whether he was doing a classical public structure, like the National Academy of Sciences Building, in Washington, or putting up a Gothic church, like St. Thomas, on Fifth Avenue, or striking out on his own, as he did in the Los Angeles Public Library and the Nebraska State Capitol, his work showed taste and care and originality. The inscription on his memorial in the Chapel of the Intercession of Trinity Parish, here in New York, reads, 'He touched nothing which he did not beautify.' There can't be any argument with that."

In the interests of efficiency, Goodhue's staff was divided into two groups of specialists—one Gothic, the other classical. Harrison was a classical man, having been hired specifically to superintend the construction of the National Academy of Sciences Building, in which Goodhue sought to endow an up-to-date plan with an Athenian tranquillity. The Academy of Sciences Building, which Harrison worked on for about two years, turned out well—so well, in fact, that it later served as a guide, and sometimes as a blueprint, for architects all over the country who were commissioned to design "modernized-classical" courthouses, libraries, galleries, and other public buildings. From time to time, Harrison was taken off the Academy of Sciences Building in order to help work out the designs for the tower of the Nebraska State Capitol, since it was Goodhue's policy to call in outside men occasionally to get a fresh point of view on some phase of a project that might be going stale. Goodhue died, quite suddenly, on April 23, 1924. "I think it was on a weekend," Harrison says. "It seems to me I came in to work on a Monday and learned that I'd been fired. The Gothic group had taken over. Most of us classical fellows were out on our ears. I was, anyhow."

Harrison and another classical outcast, the late Robert Rogers, decided to go into business for themselves. They rented office space in the National Association Building, at 25 West Forty-third Street, and set about corraling clients. Through a cousin of Rogers' who was the local sales representative for a company that put out grated cheese, they wangled a commission to remodel the front of the Cheshire Cheese Restaurant, on West Forty-third Street. The front was only eighteen feet high and twelve feet wide, but the partners labored over that façade for twelve months; it gave them something to do when they were not out scouring the town for their second customer, whom they never found. Rogers had some money of his own to tide him over, but Harrison was reduced to taking in architectural washing. His former *maître*, Corbett, gave him an odd job now and then designing minor parts of buildings, and Raymond Hood, a brilliant alumnus of Goodhue's who was now doing very well on his own, helped out by thinking of Harrison whenever he needed perspective sketches. After a year of just scraping by, Harrison, following up a tip from Corbett's partner, Frank J. Helmle, applied for, and got, a job as associate architect for the New York City Board of Education, and he and his partner, their restaurant front finished and their patience exhausted, happily dissolved their firm.

Harrison's new job paid seventy-five hundred dollars a year, which he thought "perfectly enormous"—so enormous, in fact, that he felt free to marry Miss Milton, a young New York social worker whom he had known for two years. The job itself turned out to be nothing much. In the course of one of the Board of Education's periodic efforts to do something about the shortage of schools, some municipal statistician had figured out that a new school would have to be completed every three days for the next year to provide adequate facilities. Responding to this challenge, the Mayor, John Hylan, who was no man to do things by halves, had ordered five hundred draftsmen and designers rounded up and installed in a mammoth room in a loft building at the Brooklyn end of the Williamsburg Bridge, with instructions to turn out plans for new schools at printing-press speed. Harrison was brought in to supervise all five hundred of them. To his dismay, he found that he was expected to make a daily inspection tour of the room, stopping at each drawing board long enough to drop some incisive critical observation. It took Harrison nearly six months to get around the room once. "By the time I got back to the first board, I found that the design had been approved by some official while I was out in center field, and contractors were already bidding on it," he recalls. "Same thing the second time around. Hell, I wasn't doing any good at all." Harrison resigned at the end of a year and took a part-time job teaching design at the Columbia School of Architecture. Then, in January, 1927, Helmle, his good angel, got in touch with him again and invited him to join the firm of Helmle & Corbett, as a junior partner.

At the time Helmle & Corbett became Helmle, Corbett & Harrison, the firm was engaged in a number of projects that were both financially and artistically stimulating, among them the Roerich Museum, on Riverside Drive, and No. 1 Fifth Avenue, and, in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a twenty-three-story skyscraper; it was buildings of this sort that, three years later, prompted the Rockefellers to pick the firm, along with three others, to design Rockefeller Center. Harrison felt that at last he had found his niche. "I finally knew for sure that I wanted to be a *modern* architect," he told a companion one day early last spring as they were crossing the Plaza of Rockefeller Center on their way to Harrison's office. "I don't mean I was a purist. That isn't in me. But while I was hacking away at the Board of Education, it became absolutely clear to me that the only sound ap-

proach to architecture is to think in terms of the people who will be using the building—that the function of architecture is to take care of human beings in a pleasant way. Say it's a school you're doing. The question you've got to ask yourself is: 'How do I utilize the best principles of design and the advances of our modern technology so that we get something here in which the teachers and the pupils—and the little guys who make up the community—can come together in the most agreeable atmosphere we can create for them?' That was how Corbett and Helmle looked at architecture, too. And the firm was busy! I had to take work home every night. For the first time in I don't know how long, I had my feet under me—lots of work to do, and good, steady pay for doing it." Harrison slowed his ambling gait and looked down at the skaters whirling below on the ice of the sunken plaza. "Do you know what an architect is?" he asked, smiling wryly. "When all is said and done, an architect is a designer with a client." —HERBERT WARREN WIND

(This is the first of three articles on Mr. Harrison.)

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CORRECTION

Former Vice President Henry Wallace is probably still puzzling over last Tuesday's column. Probably readers are puzzled too. The column, which referred to Eisenhower's efforts to study the problem of Oakies, Arkies and migrant workers, contained this sentence: "Wallace was one of the few government officials who ever tried to migrate across the U.S."

Frankly I was thunderstruck when I saw this line in print. So probably was the Wallace family. The ex-vice president, ex-secretary of agriculture did move from Des Moines, Iowa, to Washington to join the Roosevelt cabinet and now lives on a farm north of New York City. But he certainly did not migrate across the United States in the usual sense of the word, and he certainly was no migrant farm hand.

So I looked up the column as I originally wrote it. It read: "Wallace was one of the few government officials who ever tried to do much about the Oakies, Arkies and itinerant farm hands who migrated across the U.S." What happened was that the teletype operator skipped one line. My apologies.

However, considering all the copy they have to transmit, it's a wonder teletype operators don't make more mistakes.—*Drew Pearson in the Pottsville (Pa.) Republican.*

What makes you think they don't?

PROFILES

ARCHITECT

II—THE SQUARE THAT BECAME A CENTER

NEXT to Frank Lloyd Wright, who, as the father of modern American architecture and perhaps its only true genius, occupies a unique position in his field, the person commonly regarded as the most influential figure in present-day building design in this country is Wallace K. Harrison. A fifty-nine-year-old New York architect who has been associated with about seven hundred million dollars' worth of new buildings during the last quarter of a century and was a member of the seven-man team of architects responsible for Rockefeller Center, Harrison was nevertheless largely unknown outside his profession until he took on the job of architect-in-chief of the headquarters of the United Nations. Except for his predilection for wearing shirts of faintly Left Bank hues and for daubing away at tortuous abstract paintings when his spirits sag, there is little or nothing in Harrison's appearance or manner that fits the classic concept of a high-geared creative temperament. A tall, rugged man with a stalwart conscience, who fell into architecture by accident when, at the age of fourteen, he went to work as an office boy with a construction company in his native Worcester, Massachusetts, Harrison talks with a raspy New England twang, wears what is left of his gray-brown hair at a conventional length, adheres whenever possible to a nine-to-five working schedule, and regards potato farming as the consummate hobby. "Wally's a perfect Yankee—always was and always will be," an architect who has known Harrison for thirty-five years said recently. "That's one of the reasons he gets along so well with foreigners, like the members of the international board of design who worked with him on the U.N.—he's exactly what they expect an American to be like. Wally's as plain as an old shoe. It's no façade. He really is. But he's a fellow who learns from experience and he's had a lot of it, so today he's also a very sophisticated man. He understands businessmen, politicians, and scientists just about as well as he understands architects and other artistic types. They all feel, when they first talk with Wally, that here, at last, is a kindred soul. He's really a sort of Renaissance man—a latter-day Michelangelo or Leonardo, completely at home in many different worlds, even in this age of specialists."

Over the years, Harrison, who has a way of becoming personally attached to the people he works with, has developed a wide and varied circle of friends that includes painters, bankers, construction foremen, high-ranking statesmen of many countries, Kiwanians, conservative and socialist political philosophers, steel magnates, and Latin-American poets. He is always intensely concerned about their problems, professional or personal, and these are likely to involve him on so many levels at once that his associates sometimes wish they had a score card to identify the players. Last autumn, for example, while he was chatting in his office with a young manufacturer of plastics, his secretary put a phone call through to him. "I had no idea who Wally was talking to," the plastics man said later, "but they were evidently discussing somebody who was in very bad straits—most likely, I figured, one of Wally's floundering artist friends who was only a couple of steps from potter's field. Wally, I could see, was deeply disturbed. He kept pawing his eyebrows and repeating phrases like 'We must do everything we can for him' and 'He was our friend when we needed him.' After he hung up, he didn't say anything for quite some time, and then he told me, 'We were talking about Trygve Lie. We mustn't forget him now that he's left the U.N. and retired to private life. Few people appreciate the terrific job he turned in as Secretary-General.'"

While Harrison's colleagues are generally agreed that he is a sound engineer and an adventurous designer who brings a fine creative continuity to his buildings, they are also generally agreed that, for all his talent, it is his Renaissance-man range of understanding and adaptability that principally accounts for the tremendous influence he has had on modern architecture. "The big thing is the respect Wally Harrison commands in the business world," the eminent architectural historian Talbot Hamlin remarked not long ago. "Over the last twenty years, he's been a partner in firms that have controlled a good deal of the big money. At the outset, his connection with Rockefeller Center gave him a reputation that the business world looked up to. And now, of course, the U.N. job has added enormously to his prestige. It's given him something of the status of an international statesman. All in all, he's achieved an extraordinarily powerful position for an architect, and he's used it admirably. He's been so phenomenally successful in gaining the confidence of businessmen that they've begun to accept innovations in modern architecture more readily than they ever did before. Thanks to him, many business leaders have actually become enthusiasts for the best in progressive design. Harrison has won a new kind of respect for the entire profession. I shudder when I think what could have happened if the same opportunities had fallen into the hands of a man who was less responsible, or less creative, or both." For his part, Harrison is inclined to interpret the aesthetic headway he has made in his dealings with the business community as support of his belief that architecture can rarely, if ever, be approached as pure art. "When Le Corbusier came over to work with us on the plans for the United Nations, he said to me more than once that he had never compromised with his principles," Harrison told a friend a while ago. "That's probably true of Corbu—never compromising. Well, I've compromised more

than once. Reality demands it, if the building's going to get built. The people who talk about conceiving perfection and sticking to it have never had to get down on the ground and get their hands dirty. Out in Texas we've been working on an office building for the Republic National Bank of Dallas. It's thirty-six stories high—far and away the tallest building ever put up in that part of the country. To emphasize that fact, our client wanted to top it off with some distinctive emblem that could be seen for miles away across the plains—a landmark by day and by night. We drew up a number of designs. The client didn't like them. He had his own baby. He wanted a replica of the Statue of Liberty, with the torch lit up. Now, what do you do in a case like that? Tell him he can't have it? If he wants it, he'll have one put up anyway. All you can do is present what you consider superior designs as forcefully as you can, and hope your arguments will sink in." In this instance, Harrison gained a distinct victory. The client scrapped the Statue of Liberty idea in the hope of hitting upon a symbol more truly representative of Texas but finally reversed his field and settled for a simple, spikelike spire that Harrison considers not half bad.

A man who thrives on change of pace, Harrison has designed private houses, naval installations, housing developments (in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx), service men's centers, factories, embassies, a hotel, a hospital, and a building for a zoo. His fellow-architects, however, think of him primarily as a specialist in office buildings, and with reason, for he has had a hand in the design and construction of almost a score of them, nearly all skyscrapers. His firm, Harrison & Abramovitz, is currently at work on two more big office buildings, both of them scheduled to be completed in 1956. One of these is a nineteen-story structure for the United States Rubber Company that is going up on the site of the old Center Theatre, at Sixth Avenue and Forty-ninth Street, and the other, forty-two stories tall, is being built for the Socony-Vacuum Company and will occupy the entire block bounded by Forty-first and Forty-second Streets and Third and Lexington Avenues. Harrison has long pondered the basic arguments for and against skyscrapers, which many internationally minded critics regard as the one truly original contribution America has made to architecture, and he has come to the conclusion that there are more good things than bad to be said for them, provided that there is sufficient space between them—as he feels there is at Rockefeller Center—to admit the proper amount of fresh air and sunlight. Not everybody, of course, has a plot the size of Rockefeller Center's to fool around with, but Harrison believes that ways and means of assuring open space can always be devised if the architect is really sold on its merits. For instance, the base of the forty-two-story Socony-Vacuum Building will be only three stories high; on this will stand two separate, well set-back, eleven-story slabs, connected by a central tower that will rise twenty-eight stories above them. By way of stressing the fresh-air-and-sunlight theme, Harrison is thinking of planting grass, trees, and shrubs on the roof of the three-story part of the building, with, possibly, an abbreviated brook purling among them.

"It's your wife, Ed. Want to listen to her?"

HARRISON's first experience in designing skyscrapers came in 1928, shortly after he had become a junior partner in the architectural firm headed by Frank J. Helmle and Harvey Wiley Corbett. The firm of Helmle & Corbett was one of the country's busiest and

best, and for Harrison, a rather gaunt and run-down thirty-one at the time he was asked to join it, its decision to take him in was pretty much of a lifesaver. Since he had never had any money except what he contrived to earn, his years of architectural apprenticeship had been rather tough going. During that period, in which he put in a little over a year at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, in Paris, with the help of a scholarship and a thousand dollars he had saved up as a naval ensign in the First World War, he had slowly changed from a devout, if inquiring, traditionalist to a modernist—not an extreme modernist, to be sure, but a thoroughgoing functionalist. This position corresponded quite closely to that held by Corbett, the wheel horse of the firm and a recognized leader in office-building design. From 1914 on, Corbett, an angular, vocal, red-headed engineer from California who had studied at the Beaux-Arts himself, had been championing the so-called "stripped classical" office building, a structure of simple, vertical lines unmarred by banks of Ionic columns or any of the other standard motifs of the well-bred façade. Today, of course, Corbett's views are commonplace, but in the first quarter of this century they were considered radical, for the skyscraper was a long time finding itself.

Since there has never been any real agreement on how high a building must be to be considered a skyscraper, it is impossible to say who designed the first one, but certainly Chicago architects were ahead of all others in recognizing the advantages of height in meeting the problem of housing large businesses under a single roof. In 1885, William Le Baron Jenney put up a ten-story building, supported by a steel framework, for the Home Insurance Company in that city, and six years later the sixteen-story Monadnock Building, also in Chicago, was completed, setting an all-time altitude record for a structure whose entire weight was borne by masonry walls. (To bear that weight, it was necessary to make the Monadnock's walls twelve feet thick at the base.) In 1895, Louis Sullivan, of the Chicago firm of Adler & Sullivan, built, in Buffalo, what many authorities regard as the finest of the early skyscrapers, the thirteen-story Guaranty Building. Gradually, however, New York became the center of skyscraper construction for a number of reasons, including the tendency of big business to concentrate in Manhattan, the consequent rise in the price of land on which to build here, and the island's hard-rock substratum, which provided a good support for the tremendous weights involved. In 1913, Cass Gilbert's Woolworth Building was opened on lower Broadway; seven hundred and ninety-two feet high, with an eighteen-story tower rising above its forty-two-story base, it was the tallest building the world had ever seen. Not long afterward, the municipal authorities became alarmed at the spread of shoulder-to-shoulder skyscraper construction, which had already made a sunless gulch of Wall Street, and passed a zoning law that put an end to sheer vertical walls and required architects to provide more light by tapering their buildings with setbacks every few stories. No ceiling was placed on the towers of buildings, however, and in 1931, Shreve, Lamb & Harmon showed the world what a tower could be when the firm's hundred-and-two-story Empire State Building was completed, setting a record for loftiness twelve hundred and fifty feet—that stands to this day.

At about the time Harrison joined Helmle & Corbett, the firm was drawing up plans for a twenty-three-story skyscraper that the Pennsylvania Power & Light Co. wanted to build in Allentown. "That building, the first skyscraper I ever worked on, has always seemed to me to be the perfect illustration of why the skyscraper was the logical answer to the changing business scene in this country," Harrison remarked not long ago. "Pennsylvania Power and Light had started out with just a simple office in Allentown. As its business kept growing, it had to keep finding new office space. By the late twenties, it had taken over ten or twelve houses on both sides of one of Allentown's main streets and was using each house for a separate department. In the skyscraper we built, these departments were placed one on top of another, and the increase in efficiency was enormous. You can lose a barrel of time, among other things, in a strung-out horizontal layout. To give you an example, when I was down in Washington during the war, working for Inter-American Affairs, my office was at the southeast corner of the seventh floor of the Commerce Building, and my boss's was at the northwest corner of the second floor. One day, I clocked it to see how long it took me to get down there. The trek took seven minutes. In a modern skyscraper, where the horizontal distances don't really matter much, you don't throw time away like that, as long as there is an efficient relationship between the height of the building and the elevator system. Fifteen stories is about ideal for each bank of elevators. We've found that if you run a bank any higher than fifteen, there's too much waiting. You could increase the speed of the elevators, all right, but human beings couldn't take it."

In April, 1929, about two years after Helmle & Corbett had become Helmle, Corbett & Harrison, Helmle retired and William H. MacMurray was taken in as a partner. Late in 1929, the new firm of Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray was chosen, after a competition, to collaborate with two other architectural firms on the project that in time became Rockefeller Center. Of the two other firms, one, also chosen as the result of the competition, was Hood & Fouilhoux, consisting of Raymond Hood, who had designed the Daily News Building, on East Forty-second Street, and André Fouilhoux, a French-born architect and engineer. The third firm was Reinhard & Hofmeister, consisting of Andrew Reinhard and Henry Hofmeister, who did not have to compete, because they were regularly associated with the construction enterprises of John R. Todd, and Todd had been selected to run the Rockefeller Center show. A highly successful operator in the fiercely competitive field of renting office space, Todd was also a promoter and builder and had been primarily responsible for the construction of such blue-chip ventures as the Cunard Building, the Architects Building, the Ritz Towers, the Barclay Hotel, and the Graybar Building. He was a big, ingenious, and irascible man, and, being suspicious of architects, he was seldom happier than when baiting a prominent one. After summoning Hood to his office, in the Graybar Building, and informing him that he had been chosen as one of the architects of the Rockefeller project, Todd turned to a window, waved a hand in the direction of Hood's celebrated Daily News Building, and growled, "We're hiring you not on account of that but in spite of it."

Todd himself had got in on the project during the summer of 1929, when Rockefeller Center—or Metropolitan Square, as it was then called—was little more than an idea in the mind of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Back in 1927, Rockefeller, though not an ardent operagoer himself, had been persuaded by Otto Kahn that New York ought to have a new opera house that would rank with the finest in the world. When word

of this got around, it was greeted with bravoes and promises of support by the trustees and the more illustrious patrons of the Metropolitan Opera Company, and, thus encouraged, Rockefeller, in January, 1929, leased a tract of land he had had his eye on from Columbia University, which had received it by grant of the state legislature early in the nineteenth century. This tract, of some twelve and a half acres, comprised, roughly, the three blocks bounded by Forty-eighth and Fifty-first Streets and Fifth and Sixth Avenues. The lease, calling for an annual rent of about three million dollars, was for twenty-four years, with renewal options until the year 2015. It was originally planned that the opera house, to be designed by Benjamin Wistar Morris, would be situated at the heart of the plot, and buildings on the remainder of the land would be rented out to commercial interests as offices and shops. Rockefeller had barely completed the negotiations with Columbia when word reached him that, for several complex reasons, mostly stemming from clashes of personality, the Metropolitan people's eagerness to have a new opera house had utterly subsided. Jolting as this intelligence must have been even to a Rockefeller, John D., Jr., rolled with the blow. He resolved to go ahead just the same with a midtown cultural and business center, and chose Todd to head a board of five managers who would build and operate the project. Todd's firm, the Todd, Robertson, Todd Engineering Corporation, was to let all the contracts and dig up suitable tenants, including cultural ones. Todd was to be responsible only to Rockefeller.

Early in 1930, after a lengthy search for something that could fittingly take the place of grand opera as the central attraction of the development, Todd and his board decided that the best bet was radio—the big new medium of mass entertainment. With Rockefeller's blessing, Todd took his idea to Owen D. Young, the chairman of the board of the Radio Corporation of America, who passed it along to David Sarnoff, the president of R.C.A., and the upshot was that R.C.A., together with its subsidiary, the National Broadcasting Company, and Radio-Keith-Orpheum, agreed to rent a vast amount of space in the Center and make it their headquarters. Thus the Radio City branch of Rockefeller Center came into being. Actual construction on the first building—the R.K.O.—was started in September, 1931. The riveting could be heard blocks away, for the depression was closing in and no other construction was in progress in the city. By that time, Todd agents had been sent abroad to try to interest companies in various European countries in banding together on a national basis, with each group taking a building as a focal point for their commercial activities in the United States. The agents were a diligent lot, and it was out of their efforts that the present British Empire Building, the Maison Française, and the Palazzo d'Italia materialized.

For all the lofty intentions of its backer, Rockefeller Center might have become nothing more than a covey of Graybar Buildings roosting on some of the most expensive land in the world if the architects who designed it had not been an unusually independent lot. For years, American architects had been dreaming of the magnificent things they would do if ever they were given the money, the site, and the freedom to build a city from the ground up—a city of towering buildings and broad vistas that would demonstrate the beauty of space as well as of mass. Of course, none of them expected such an opportunity to come their way, and there were cynics who said that even if it did, high aspirations would soon yield to the pressure of the client's insistence upon the tried and true. Now, all of a sudden, seven of these architects found themselves in a position to design, if not a whole city, at least a city within a city along the lines of their most improbable dreams. To be sure, the fortunate seven could not utterly disregard Todd and his preoccupation with conservative, tenant-pleasing, revenue-producing design, but, by and large, Corbett, Fouilhoux, Harrison, Hofmeister, Hood, MacMurray, and Reinhard managed to create a community of buildings that only a few years before would have been considered hopelessly visionary. They set up their headquarters in the Graybar Building, in two large rooms, one directly above the other, that were connected by a circular iron staircase. Each room was about a hundred and thirty feet long and forty feet wide, so after a conference room and the principals' offices had been partitioned off, there was plenty of space left for the desks and drawing boards of the draftsmen and designers—as many as a hundred at a time—who worked on the plans. The place was also furnished with a large table, on which René Chambellan, the sculptor, made clay models of the various plans under discussion; architects find models useful in determining which of their exploratory ideas will work out best in three dimensions. The architectural combine plodded away in these quarters for some three years, by which time the designs for the first ten of the fourteen buildings that were originally planned for the Center had been completed. Anxious as they were about the individual features of each building, the architects' overriding concern was to settle on a unified plan for the entire Center. Of the hundreds of preliminary plans dreamed up, mulled over, and rejected, the most fanciful was one that proposed covering the three blocks with one mammoth pyramidal complex of structures linked by subterranean streets and aerial ramps for both pedestrians and automobiles. There was a brief period, too, in which some consideration was given to the notion of treating the three blocks as a Chinese walled city, but this was discarded because the architects decided it not only was wrong aesthetically but also might discourage shoppers from entering the compound.

The first plan to be adopted, early in 1930, had as its key structure on Fifth Avenue an elliptically shaped building, fourteen stories high, to be situated between Forty-ninth and Fiftieth Streets, with its longer axis running east and west; behind it was to be an open space, now the Plaza, and, behind that, the lofty R.C.A. Building, with its handsome and original setbacks. Todd and his associates were banking on the curving lines to lure the public off the Avenue and into the stores that were to comprise a fashionable shopping center in and around the lower level of the Plaza. In March, 1931, a diagram of this plan and a photograph of a model of the elliptical building were released to the press. There followed what the *Times* called, in an editorial, "a perfect stream of objection, protest, and, one

may say, wondering malediction," directed principally against the elliptical building—it looked a good deal like a lady's hatbox—which, in the opinion of many highly articulate New Yorkers, violated the plan for the whole Center and completely muffed a heaven-sent opportunity to beautify the city. "I doubt if any other architectural undertaking ever received such a lambasting," Harrison says. "All of us at the Graybar thought we'd be fired, but John D., Jr., stood behind us. He simply said, 'I never read the papers when they criticize men who are working for me.'"

Nevertheless, in the face of such violent opposition, the architects decided to abandon the elliptical building in favor of the two rectangular six-story buildings that are now the British Empire Building and the Maison Française. No one will ever know what effect those curving, hatbox lines would have had on shoppers, but there is no denying that the sixty-foot-wide promenade running between the present two buildings has succeeded in luring as many people onto the grounds of the Center as even Todd could have wished. At first, however, most of them just strolled there, and the question was how to entice them down into the shops in the Lower Plaza. Slowly and painfully, while buildings continued to go up all around them, the architects and Todd's building officials fumbled their way to a solution. First, they installed the statue of Prometheus and its accompanying fountains in the Plaza, and then they persuaded the Café Français and the English Grill, which had been operating on the street level, to try their luck at the Lower Plaza's south and north ends, respectively, each of them being given fifty per cent of the open area facing Prometheus for outdoor tables. At that point, cold weather set in, and the Lower Plaza stood as bare and empty as ever. Finally, since there seemed to be no better suggestions, the now famous skating rink was tried out, as a desperate means of putting the empty space to some use, however slight. To almost everyone's astonishment, the rink caught on immediately, and the shops around it have prospered ever since. "That's the way it goes sometimes," Corbett once said. "The skating rink turned out to be the perfect attraction for Rockefeller Center, and planning had nothing to do with it. On the other hand, planning can, of course, work wonders. By giving up sixty feet of Fifth Avenue frontage—an unheard-of thing at the time—and using it as a channel between the French and British buildings, we sacrificed an obvious source of revenue. But in doing so we increased the value of the land inside the Center immeasurably. It's funny, but when a job of designing is tackled with honest-to-goodness imagination, and perhaps a touch of daring, you usually discover that it produces the only kind of architecture that really pays off in dollars and cents."

By the autumn of 1933, some two years after the excavating started, the first seven of the buildings were finished: the R.K.O. Building (thirty-one stories) in October, 1932; the Radio City Music Hall (ten stories) and the Center Theatre (nine stories) in December, 1932; the R.C.A. Building (seventy stories), the R.C.A. Building West (sixteen stories), and the British Empire Building (six stories) in May, 1933; and the Maison Française (six stories) in September, 1933. By then, too, ground had been broken for three more buildings—the Palazzo d'Italia (six stories), the International Building (forty-one stories), and the International Building North (six stories). This threesome, fronting Fifth Avenue between Fiftieth and Fifty-first Streets, opened in May, 1935. Meanwhile, Hood, the driving force of the architectural collaboration, had died in August, 1934, and his death precipitated changes in two of the three firms working on the Center. Harrison dropped out of Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray and, after a year or so as an independent, he and Hood's partner formed the firm of Harrison & Fouilhoux. Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray then became Corbett & MacMurray. Reinhard & Hofmeister remained Reinhard & Hofmeister. This setup prevailed until the thirty-six-story Time & Life Building was completed, in April, 1937, after which Corbett & MacMurray stepped out of the picture, leaving the two remaining firms to finish up the Center with three more buildings: the fifteen-story Associated Press Building, opened in November, 1938; the sixteen-story Eastern Air Lines Building, opened in October, 1939; and the twenty-story United States Rubber Company Building, opened in April, 1940. With these done, the architectural team disbanded. In 1946, when the thirty-three-story Esso Building was announced as an added starter, Harrison was named as consultant to the architects in charge.

IN the course of the decade or so that Harrison spent with Rockefeller Center, his status both as an architect and as a man of the world changed notably. In his middle thirties at the outset, he was the youngest of the seven architects, and during the conferences at which high-level policies were threshed out by his associates, Rockefeller's advisers, Todd's men, and officials of companies who had agreed to take office space in one or another of the buildings, he was seldom asked for his views. "I didn't get anywhere until I took up cigars," Harrison says now. "The big conferences were held in the Graybar Building after a lavish lunch or dinner at the Barclay, and I'd come into the conference room from the dining room bursting with ideas. The minute I saw a chance to speak up, I spoke up. Even when I knew my points were damn good, they never made the slightest impression on anyone. It took me a couple of months to figure it out. It wasn't so much that I was a kid compared to the rest of them. The trouble was that I'd been wasting my ammunition—I'd been doing my talking before the older men had digested their meals and were ready to think. I wasn't a cigar smoker, but from that time on, when they passed the cigars around, I took one, and waited till we had all puffed them down to the butt before I said a word. It really made a difference."

As Rockefeller Center took shape, Harrison came to be more and more respected by his associates as a good all-round man to have on the team. A good many of the people connected with the Center in those days feel that it was he who, after Hood's death, emerged as the strong man, capable of pushing through the necessary agreements between the architects and the management before differences of opinion degenerated into a test of egos, as

conflicts have a way of doing once the initial enthusiasm for any long-term collaborative enterprise has evaporated. While no one architect can be credited with the design of any of the Center buildings, it is clear that, as time went on, Harrison's ideas began to carry increasing weight with his colleagues, and in consequence, experts think, some of the later buildings embody a good many of them—particularly the Eastern Air Lines Building, which was the Center's first slab-style structure. From the very inception of the Center, Harrison had been plumping for the slab, convinced that the simpler the form of any object, the stronger its impact. For that reason, too, he was opposed to the setbacks on the front of the R.C.A. Building; he argued that they would give it a consciously artistic touch that might not wear well. The front was set back anyway, but six years later, in 1938, when plans for the Eastern Air Lines Building came up for consideration, Harrison's colleagues were ready to go along with him on the idea of unbroken slabs. They approached this new project boldly. The eleven-story tower of the building, rising unindented and unadorned above a five-story spread-out base, is almost as sheerly rectangular as a matchbox. Because the Eastern Air Lines Building looks so small next to its Brobdingnagian neighbors, sightseers are inclined to ignore it, but architects regard it with respect as the trail blazer of a wholly new approach to office-building design—one that, a dozen or more years later, was given its most lucid and striking expression to date in the United Nations Secretariat and in Lever House, which was designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

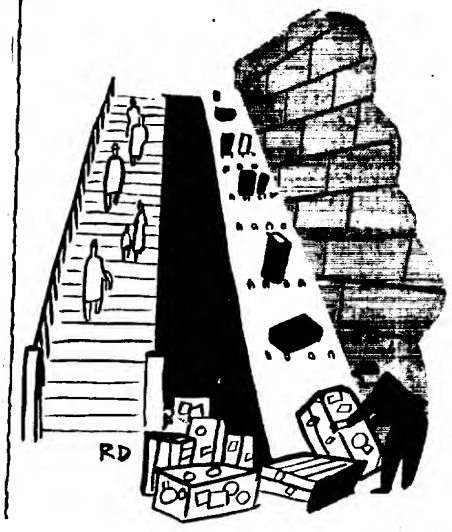
In 1932, after Todd had with some difficulty been persuaded that leading painters and sculptors should be brought in to decorate the Center, Harrison, who had advocated this step after stubbing out many a postprandial cigar, was sent to Europe to line up first-rate artists there. Carl Milles and José Maria Sert eventually came to New York and added their contributions to those of Lee Lawrie, Paul Manship, William Zorach, Diego Rivera, and other North American artists, but Harrison was unable to work out any arrangement with Picasso, Despiau, Matisse, or Maillol. "There was always a conflict in schedules," he recalled recently. "We didn't have any trouble with the French artists about subject matter, since we were willing to leave that up to them. I remember telling old Maillol—we wanted him to do a sculpture for the entrance to the Maison Française—that he would have absolutely free rein. 'I can do only one thing—a woman,' he said. 'How do you want me to do her—lying down or standing up?' "

THE offices of Harrison & Abramovitz are on the second floor of the International Building, in Rockefeller Center, and its staff, which fluctuates in size according to the amount of work on the agenda, averages about sixty-five—a figure that includes forty or so draftsmen, who toil in a much partitioned room the size of a couple of basketball courts. The whole place is air-conditioned and soundproofed; the walls are brightly painted in blue, white, gray, and orange; and, all in all, it is the sort of office that one would expect a successful firm of modern architects to occupy. It is, however, a far cry from what Harrison was accustomed to up to last February, when he moved into it. During the year he operated as an independent, before the Harrison & Fouilhoux partnership was formed, his office consisted simply of a single, bare room on the fifty-second floor of the R.C.A. Building, occupied by a skeleton staff of half a dozen draftsmen. One of the designers who whiled away his time in this room was Harrison's present partner—Max Abramovitz. A graduate of the University of Illinois School of Architecture, Abramovitz spent his first two years in New York teaching elementary and advanced design at the Columbia School of Architecture. He became associated with Harrison quite by accident. Around the time Abramovitz came to New York, Harrison and some other established architects, including Ralph Walker, who designed the Irving Trust Company Building, at 1 Wall Street, and the New York Telephone Company Building, on West Street, were conducting seminars at the New School of Social Research, each consisting of a group of three student-architects. At Walker's invitation, Abramovitz signed up for his seminar, but through a clerical error, he found himself in Harrison's. He meant to change over to Walker's, but somehow he never got around to it, and at the end of the course, he accepted his instructor's invitation to join the skimpy Harrison staff. "There we were, hanging around in that room on the fifty-second floor," Abramovitz recalled recently. "Wally was too busy at the Graybar Building to spend much time with us. We drew up the plans for a couple of houses the firm was doing in Bermuda, but that was the only real job we had. The rest of the time, we made work for ourselves—or, rather, Wally made it for us. Once, we spent eight months redesigning Central Park—not because anyone had commissioned the firm to do so but because Wally thought it would be a stimulating exercise. We started with the premise that Central Park was a traffic bottleneck. Our problem was to figure out a scheme that would unplug it and still keep the greenery." Harrison felt that by paying the occupants of the lonely aerie regular wages for solutions to theoretical problems of this sort he was hardheadedly investing in a future staff. "I wanted designers who would attack a problem by thinking about it in fresh terms," he says. "I wanted a staff that would keep moving away from the stereotype. After Fouilhoux and I formed our partnership, I found he felt as I did, and we carried on that way. I know some critics have said that because we never knew exactly where we were going, our office was weak. Maybe it was, and maybe it still is. That's the way we like it—no assembly-line methods, I mean, no trademarks."

In 1935, Harrison and Fouilhoux moved their headquarters from the R.C.A. Building to a larger, though not much more formal or attractive, office on the eighth floor of the International Building. Here the firm ran a sort of international clubhouse, where visiting European architects and kindred artists could always count on finding a chair and a drawing board waiting for them. Among those who availed themselves of this hospitality were Alvar Aalto, a Finnish architect and designer who has since done several important buildings in this country, including a dormitory for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the French abstractionist Fernand Léger; Oscar Nitzchke, a Swiss architectural designer; and Maurice Rotival, a French expert on city planning, whom Harrison brought over here to help teach a course in that subject that he had been asked to set up at the Yale School of Fine Arts. All this was in line with Harrison's belief that the people in his firm should keep in touch with what was going on in other parts of the world and in the allied arts, and, to make his staff even more aware of new ideas and techniques, he invited two European painters—Amédée Ozenfant and Werner Drewes—to give a series of afterhours office lectures on form, attendance optional.

As Harrison and his partner put Rockefeller Center further and further behind them, they began to branch

out. During the years immediately preceding the Second World War, they designed the Rockefeller Apartments, on West Fifty-fourth Street; the Theme Center for the New York World's Fair; the Avila Hotel, in Caracas, Venezuela; and, with Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, the architects of the Empire State Building, they drew up the plans for the new Hunter College building, on Park Avenue. The earliest of these projects, the Rockefeller Apartments, grew out of the esteem Harrison and Nelson Rockefeller had come to feel for each other during the construction of the Center, and was the first of many enterprises on which they worked together. The two men first met in 1926, around the time Harrison married Ellen Hunt Milton—making them brothers-in-law of a sort, for Mrs. Harrison is the sister of David Milton, who was married at that time to Nelson's sister, Abby Rockefeller—but they saw little of each other until the Center was well under way. Rockefeller, who was a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art, discovered at the Center's planning conferences that Harrison shared his enthusiasm for modern art. "I came to admire a lot of other things Wally stood for, too, and the way he stood for them," Rockefeller says. As time went on, Harrison and Rockefeller got in the habit of meeting once a week in midmorning or midafternoon in the Gateway Restaurant, to the rear of Prometheus in the Lower Plaza, and exchanging ideas over coffee and a bacon roll—two strips of bacon grilled on the halves of a soft roll, a Rockefeller favorite. The Rockefeller Apartments was one of many ventures that originated at the sessions in the Gateway. The plot on which the apartment houses stand, on the north side of Fifty-fourth Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, was originally set aside by the Rockefellers to serve as one corner of a huge subsidiary Center, devoted to the arts, that would extend north from Rockefeller Center, covering the eastern half of the blocks from Fifty-first to Fifty-fifth Streets. The plan for this undertaking fell through when the Kriendler brothers, the proprietors of "21," declined to sell their building on Fifty-second Street. (Before the Rockefellers became reconciled to abandoning the project, they considered going ahead despite "21," running streets around the restaurant, and setting it off as an island—an arrangement that would certainly have given the holdout Kriendlers an ideal location, making their place a sort of Ile de la Cité, with the arts on one side of them and the Chase National on the other.) The Rockefeller Apartments, consisting of two twelve-story buildings separated by a spacious garden, were an audacious departure from the common, or non-garden, approach to apartment-house design, which, seeking only to provide the maximum number of rentable rooms, used every legal inch of the plot for building. "The real-estate groups were really browned off by the Rockefeller Apartments," Herman Axelrod, a New York builder, said recently. "Those two buildings changed the standards. With Rockefeller and Harrison giving up fifteen per cent more space to light and air than they were required to, you can guess what happened. Before the buildings were half finished, all the apartments had been leased and people were scrambling to get on the waiting list—and, mind you, this was at a time when apartments all over the city were begging for tenants."

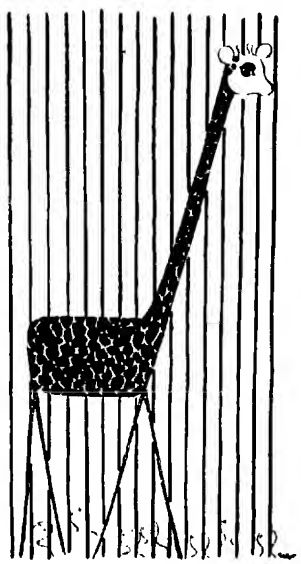


The Hotel Avila, which was not only the second collaboration between Nelson Rockefeller and Harrison but Rockefeller's first important sortie into inter-American affairs, was built on an old hacienda a few miles outside Caracas. Constructed of reinforced concrete as a precaution against earthquakes, the Avila was the forerunner of modern tropical hotels. It consists of a central lobby flanked by two long narrow wings, each of them with an open gallery along one side and private balconies on the other; the rooms stretch the width of the wings, from gallery to balcony, and are equipped at both sides with sliding panels for cross-ventilation.

IN 1936, Harrison's firm was chosen to design the Theme Center for the New York World's Fair on the basis of a competition open to all architects practicing in the city. This competition, which was judged by the World's Fair board of design, made up of a dozen architects, engineers, and industrial designers, was a rather unusual one, in that the designs submitted did not have to be descriptive of the building the candidate proposed putting up, but might consist of no more than an expanded sketch of something that would give the judges an idea of the terms in which the competing firm was thinking about the Fair. Harrison & Fouilhoux entered the competition with a design for a tent. "We'd been asking ourselves and everybody else in the office, 'What's most expressive of the atmosphere of a fair?'" Harrison says. "We had a designer working with us then named Oltar-Jevsky, who was a very talented guy from Leningrad. We got him to tell us what the famous fair at Novgorod was like. He said they didn't have permanent buildings—just huge canvas tents that were lighted at night with colored lanterns. That, we agreed, was the essence of a fair—blowing tent tops and gay, lively colors. Instead of colored lanterns, our tent had a lot of colored balloons." After having been selected to do the Theme Center on the strength of this design, Harrison and Fouilhoux put aside the tent idea because they felt that it hardly suggested a theme, and began exercising their imaginations in an effort to hit upon some architectural concept that would really stir the public and also symbolize the spirit of the Fair. "One of the special functions of architecture is to provide people with a chance to see something they've never seen before," Harrison has since said. "For its day, the Eiffel Tower, the focal structure of the Paris Exposition of 1889, was perfect. There'd never been anything like it. What's more, the visitors could go right up to the top of the tower. That was something in 1889—man had never built that high above the earth before. By 1939, though, height meant nothing. Well, the theme of the Fair was 'The World of Tomorrow,' and the first idea that struck me as a step in the right direction was to use a sphere, a complete sphere, as a major element of the design. Ever since the dome was used by the Romans for the Pantheon, in the second century, architects had been trying to expose a larger and larger segment of it undercutting it more and more, until, in Persia and India, they succeeded in exposing ninety per cent of it. Why couldn't we do a total-

ly exposed sphere? It had one merit, at least—to my knowledge, it had never been done before." Harrison and Fouilhoux and their assistants made hundreds of sketches, experimenting with spheres of all sizes and combining them with objects resembling Maypoles, spinning tops, inverted obelisks, clover-leaf intersections, ellipses cutting across other ellipses, and so on. Sometimes, Harrison thought of discarding the complete sphere, or perisphere, but he found himself returning to it again and again, and finally concluded that it would be most effective combined with a three-sided obelisk, or trylon. After he and his staff completed their one thousand-and-thirty-sixth sketch, he settled on a perisphere two hundred feet in diameter, connected by a circular ramp with a seven-hundred-foot trylon, standing alongside.

Then Harrison was faced with the task of selling the idea of a trylon and perisphere at a meeting of the board of design. In addition to a clay model of the proposed structures, Harrison and Walter H. Kilham, Jr., an architect who had worked closely with him on the design and who accompanied him on this crucial mission, took along to the meeting some twenty photographs of famous Italian buildings, all of them asymmetric in composition. "Wally thought they might come in handy," Kilham recalled a while ago. "He figured that the board might not be very receptive to a design that didn't have a tower at each end, or in the middle. He couldn't have been righter. First, the board wanted to know why the trylon hadn't been placed directly in front of the sphere or directly behind it. Wally replied that if you put the trylon in front, it would cut the sphere in half, and if you put it behind, you'd get something that looked like one of those old German war helmets with a spike on top. Then the board objected that placing the trylon to one side of the sphere threw the design off balance and that this was all wrong; monumental buildings were always symmetrical. Wally reached for our pile of photographs and calmly exhibited them, one after another—the Cathedral of St. Mark's and the Campanile in Venice, the Cathedral and the Campanile in Florence, the Cathedral in Padua, and several others. If that sold anybody, they concealed it beautifully. There was some long-jawed hemming and hawing, and then Wally suddenly grabbed a cigar from his breast pocket, stood up, and threw it angrily on the floor. I've never asked him, but I don't think he ever intended to smoke that cigar when he put it in his pocket. I'm almost certain he brought it along in case the meeting got bogged down to the point where a violent gesture was needed to shake everyone up. That's the only time I've ever seen him go into an act, and it was an awfully effective one. The discussion got right down to business, and pretty soon Walter Dorwin Teague came out for the design. That broke the ice. One by one, the others dropped their reservations, and the design was accepted." To save money, the Fair's board of estimate later reduced the size of the trylon and perisphere by some twenty per cent. Harrison has always believed that the design would have been far more effective in its original dimensions, but, having won his main point, he settled for the diminished trylon and perisphere cheerfully enough.



IN the late nineteen-thirties, Harrison found himself associating more and more frequently with a group of other comparatively young New Yorkers who had risen precociously to the top of their professions, and were now turning their attention increasingly to community and national affairs. Besides Nelson Rockefeller, this coterie included William Benton, Adolf Berle, Beardsley Ruml, Buckminster Fuller, Robert Moses, and John Hay Whitney. With the approach of the Second World War, it began to appear inevitable that those of its members who had not already gravitated into government service would turn up in Washington sooner or later. Harrison turned up there in June, 1941—ten months after Rockefeller, who had prevailed upon the Roosevelt administration to set up the Office of the Coördinator of Inter-American Affairs and had then been asked to head it. Harrison joined the office as director of the Cultural Relations Division and turned over the job of running the architectural firm to Fouilhoux and their new partner, Abramovitz.

When Harrison was shown the office in the Commerce Building that he was to occupy, along with his assistant, George Dudley, a young member of the firm he took down to Washington with him, his first reaction was "Let's throw these desks out and get some drawing boards in here." By the time the drawing boards came, Harrison had made a successful adjustment to the standard-model desk, but otherwise he accepted little of the apparatus of bureaucracy. Arriving at his office after a breakfast to the accompaniment of a lesson in Spanish from a young Mexican member of his Washington staff, he would swiftly dispose of the mound of paper that had accumulated in his "in" basket overnight by jotting down a few notes to himself on whatever inter- and intra-office memorandums he considered important, pencilling on a corner of certain letters a laconic instruction to his secretary, such as "Say no politely" or "Make appt.," and tossing the residue into a drawer. "If you stick this stuff in a drawer, it almost always takes care of itself," he once explained to a fellow-administrator. "And, that way, you have time to see people and get on with the job." Even though Harrison and Dudley had adapted themselves to desks, they spent a great deal of their time in a chart room, where they built up a collection of maps and diagrams bearing on various aspects of the Central and South American countries, such as railroad lines, areas where yaws were endemic, locations of branches of the Export-Import Bank, and sites of strategic mineral deposits. "The mission of our office was to work out a program that would improve the standard of living in the twenty countries we were working with," Dudley says. "The charts proved invaluable when it came to clarifying our reams of data and pointing up the key areas to concentrate on—areas where, if we improved living conditions by combatting yaws, let's say, we might also improve relations between the Americas. In the chart room, we had it all at our fingertips." Since the products of the Harrison-Dudley chart room could be easily and quickly grasped, a visit to it was looked upon as essential by many foreign dignitaries who came

here to get filled in on what was happening south of the border.

In December, 1944, when Rockefeller was appointed Assistant Secretary of State in charge of relations with other American republics, Harrison moved up to Deputy Coördinator of the Office of Inter-American Affairs, as the agency had been more simply renamed, and later he became Coördinator. He found the work fascinating, and threw himself into it with a conscientiousness that made some of his fellow-bureaucrats smile. Once, on a trip to Caracas, after he had spent a morning being taken on a tour of the city by a ranking government official, he met a labor-union leader at lunch whom he persuaded to take him on a second tour of the city, so that he could get the other side of the picture. "On the whole, I think our Latin-American program was damn successful," Harrison says. "The Act of Chapultepec, which the nations of North, Central, and South America signed in 1946, is one of the best defense pacts in existence today. Nelson took several of us down to Mexico City for the signing, and it gave us all a terrific feeling of accomplishment. Government work can be dull as the devil, and frustrating, but there were stretches during the four and a half years I spent in Washington when I've never been more engrossed in my work, or happier. As a matter of fact, there were days at a time when things were humming along so nicely I never even gave a thought to architecture."—HERBERT WARREN WIND

(This is the second of three articles on Mr. Harrison.)

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NEW YORK, Oct. 16 (AP)—Mrs. Magdalena Marsili, of Rockford, Ill., sailed today on the S.S. Constitution, for Rome. She will attend the beautification of a younger sister . . . —*Chicago American.*

It's a long way to go.

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She was graduated from Huntington High School and has been employed as a secretary in New York City. Her husband is a buyer for a Philadelphia Dept. Store and deserved four years in the U. S. Air Force.—*The Long Islander.*

Maybe it's not too late.

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LETTERS WE NEVER FINISHED READING

FAULTLESS LAUNDRY
KANSAS CITY 8, MO.

DEAR SIR:

You never before have had a letter from a Shirt, have you?

Being . . .

PROFILES

ARCHITECT

III—A TAXI TO THE U. N.

Wallace Harrison

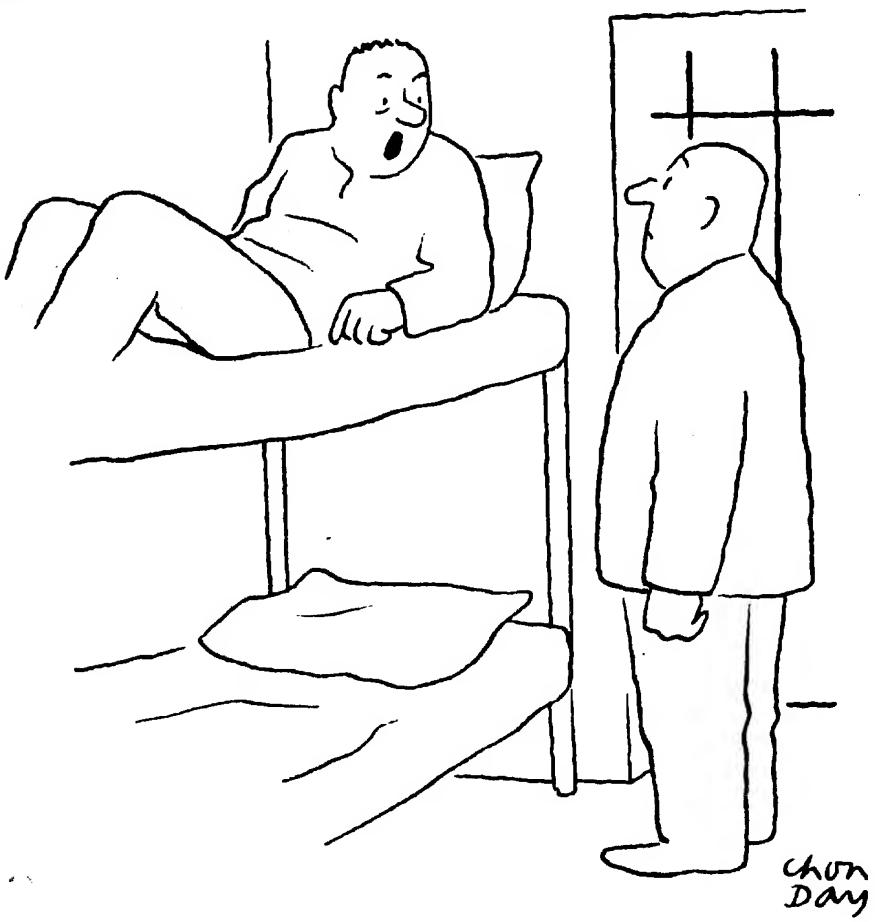
ON days when a strong southeast wind is whipping over Manhattan, Wallace K. Harrison, a fifty-nine-year-old New York architect, who served as director of planning for the Permanent Headquarters of the United Nations, frequently finds it hard to center his full attention on his current projects. A tall, rugged, Roman-faced man who grew up in Massachusetts and is endowed with one of that region's traditional traits, a ponderous conscience, Harrison finds his thoughts travelling irresistibly across town from his office, in Rockefeller Center, to the East River and the United Nations buildings—specifically, to the Secretariat, the thirty-nine-story slab whose broad sides are uninterrupted walls of glass. "I don't know what I could have been thinking of—a building with all that glass on such an exposed site!" he exclaimed one recent windy morning to a group of his associates in the firm of Harrison & Abramovitz. "Boy, those windows take a beating! I know as well as the next guy that the gustiest winds we get in New York are southeasters. And I know that the East River is a perfect highway for them, and they sweep right up it unimpeded. I *knew* all these things when we were working on the Secretariat, and still, somehow, I didn't do anything about it. Well, our experts tell us the windows are perfect now, and that helps, but putting them in in the first place was hardly a stroke of brilliance." Coming from the architect who is customarily regarded as the most influential American practitioner of his generation, such a declaration of personal fallibility amounts to outright eccentricity nowadays, when it has become standard operating procedure for prominent architects to reëvaluate their earlier buildings as more impeccable, more epochal, than even they conceded at the time they designed them. "Actually, it's ridiculous to compare Wally Harrison with the geniuses of our profession," the British architect Howard Robertson, who was a member of the international board of design that planned the United Nations headquarters under Harrison's leadership, said not long ago. "Wally is an entirely different breed of animal from Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier. They're pure artists, great revolutionaries. Wally's a man whose profession is architecture. There's a true strain of the dreamer and the poet and the artist in him, but his visions are always tempered by a realistic appreciation of the conditions he's operating under on any particular job—the money that's available, the men he's working with, the time factor. He's a far rarer type than a genius, and in our world, such as it is today, he's at least as valuable. He can get difficult jobs done. I suspect that if the task of building the U.N. had been placed in the hands of any of the several architects who felt that the commission should have been theirs by divine right, the U.N. delegates would still be leading a highly nomadic existence."

People who have known Harrison ever since he first came to New York, in 1916, are inclined to feel that his ability to combine dreaming with getting things done may be attributed to the extreme vicissitudes of his earlier days, which were marked by a prolonged stretch of joyless grubbing that gave him ample time to muse about things as they might be, and was followed by a swift rise to a position of responsibility in the world of affairs. Unlike most of his colleagues, who made architecture their career because it appealed to them as a means of using their creative gifts to benefit the community, Harrison stumbled into architecture by accident when, at the age of fourteen, he found himself obliged to support himself and took the first job he could get, which happened to be that of office boy for a construction company in his home town of Worcester. This job gradually led to drafting, and aroused his interest in architectural matters generally. In all, Harrison struggled along through seventeen lean years, interrupted only by a hitch in the Navy during the First World War and a couple of spells in Paris as a rather overage student at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, before he broke into the big time as a partner in an architectural firm headed by Harvey Wiley Corbett—a connection that shortly afterward gave him the opportunity to help design Rockefeller Center. When Harrison looks back on the long and painful apprenticeship that preceded his arrival—something he does no more often than necessary—he feels sure that it accounts for the skepticism with which he now listens to some of his fellow-architects as they loftily insist that a modern building should have no connection with the past, or that it should be a machine for living, or that it should be a symbol of its own function. "I consider myself a modern architect, but a fellow like me, who has gone through the mill, never goes in for complete and uninhibited revolt," he says. "When you leave your drawing board and start getting your hands dirty, you stop thinking of buildings as a challenge to your ability to create absolute art. You're happy to settle for good buildings that get built, in the hope that they'll lead to progressively better buildings."

Harrison spent ten years working on Rockefeller Center, and in the course of that extended meeting of strong minds and hard currency he developed from a talented young designer into a mature architect. At the same time, a friendship that has had a marked bearing on his career ever since grew up between him and Nelson Rockefeller, who in 1938 became president of Rockefeller Center, Inc., and, like Harrison, is a man with a strong catalytic gift. As the thirties advanced and the world situation grew increasingly grave, these two men shared the concern of many others about the apparent inevitability of war in Europe and the possibility that such a war might spread across the Atlantic. Rockefeller, who knew Latin America well, was especially fearful about the South American republics; since the United States had been paying little attention to them for years, he felt that they might well fall to the totalitarians by default unless this coun-

try adopted a new and vigorous hemispheric policy. With the assistance of Harrison, Beardsley Ruml, and other informed friends, Rockefeller drew up an exhaustive memorandum on the subject and turned it over to Harry Hopkins, who brought it to the attention of President Roosevelt. Impressed, the President at once created a special government agency called the Office of the Coördinator of Inter-American Affairs, and in August, 1940, appointed Rockefeller to head it. Rockefeller suggested to Harrison that he drop everything and join him in Washington, but this proved impossible just then, what with the commitments of Harrison's firm—Harrison, Fouilhoux & Abramovitz—and a project he was working on with Rockefeller's brother Laurance and the Navy to save steel by building ships of concrete. The following June, however, Harrison turned the firm over to his two partners André Fouilhoux and Max Abramovitz—and joined Rockefeller's agency as Assistant Coördinator in charge of its Cultural Relations Division. He subsequently became the Deputy Coördinator, and in March, 1945, after Rockefeller was transferred to the State Department, took over the job of Coördinator.

WEARY in mind and thin in wallet after nearly five years of government service, Harrison returned to New York and architecture in April, 1946. He found his firm in bad shape. Not long after Harrison had gone to Washington, Abramovitz, who was regarded by his partners as an enormously skillful designer, had joined the Air Force, and had spent two years on General Chennault's staff, building airfields in China. Fouilhoux carried on alone as best he could until shortly before the end of the war, when he was killed by a fall from the roof of a housing project the firm was putting up in Brooklyn. "He'd been terribly overworked and under a great strain for a long, long time," Harrison told a friend recently. "He was a wonderful guy, Fouilhoux—and a superb architect. We'd been partners since 1935." Harrison and Abramovitz, who was released by the Air Force early in 1946, set about reorganizing the firm, and before long they had all the business they could handle. Their first spectacular postwar commission was to draw up plans for X City, the city-within-a-city that William Zeckendorf, then executive vice-president of the real-estate brokerage firm of Webb & Knapp, was thinking of putting up on approximately the same site as that now occupied by the United Nations. Soon, however, Harrison found that he wasn't happy simply devoting himself to business as usual. "The battles were over, but the struggle was just as intense," he says. "We couldn't suddenly drop countries we'd been helping during the war and tell them to shift for themselves. There was a lot of work to be done, and among the many things we had learned while we were running the South American office was that you don't build a stable world just with propaganda and banquets." As staunch believers in the United Nations, which had voted to make its permanent headquarters somewhere in the United States and was weighing the advantages of various sites, Rockefeller and Harrison were delighted to accept appointments to a Committee of Plan and Scope that Mayor O'Dwyer had organized, with Robert Moses at its head, to present the case for New York City. The United Nations Permanent Headquarters Committee—a body appointed in January, 1946, and consisting of one representative from each of the member countries—had specified that it must have a site of at least two thousand acres (it later discarded this requirement), and the only available city-owned area that size was in Flushing Meadow, a practically subaqueous tract whose shortcomings were obvious to everybody. Rockefeller and Harrison, both of whom felt that the cosmopolitan spirit of New York and its exceptional communications facilities made it the natural home for the U.N., prepared a one-reel movie showing how the city planned to refurbish the Meadow if the United Nations would agree to settle there, but it failed to stir the members of the Permanent Headquarters Committee; during their tours of duty out there at Lake Success, then the U.N.'s temporary headquarters, they had had their fill of the region's subtle swampland aroma, and wanted no more of it, with or without improvements. By December, 1946, the Permanent Headquarters Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Eduardo Zuleta Angel, of Colombia, had finished inspecting the various other sites that had been offered to the organization, and had just about made up its mind to take a ten-square-mile one in suburban Phila-



"I wish I had my life to live over. Believe me, I'd pick a different lawyer!"

delphia. The Australian delegation and quite a few others representing countries in the Pacific area favored San Francisco, but the important European delegations, Russia among them, were dead set against the West Coast. As for the East Coast, an early preference for Connecticut's Fairfield County cooled off after several members of the Permanent Headquarters Committee had been stoned by the local inhabitants during an inspection trip there, and Boston's best offer wasn't in the same leafy league with the spacious tract that Philadelphia was prepared to make available.

On the morning of Sunday, December 8th, Nelson Rockefeller, who was in Mexico City for the inauguration of President Miguel Alemán, received a joint telephone call from Harrison and Frank Jamieson, a former Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaperman who handles the Rockefeller family's relations with the press and the public. They were calling to inform him of the Philadelphia threat and of the need for immediate action if he still had any hopes for New York. Rockefeller, who did indeed still have hopes for New York, arrived at LaGuardia Field around six that evening and was met by Harrison and Clark Eichelberger, another member of the Mayor's committee. The three men were driven directly to the United Nations' temporary headquarters at Lake Success, where, after being held up at the gates for an hour while the guards checked to see if they were who they claimed to be, they had a talk with Secretary-General Trygve Lie, Dr. Zuleta Angel, and Senator Warren Austin, the head of the American delegation to the U.N. Rockefeller asked them whether they thought the members of the Headquarters Committee might still consider settling in or around New York. Senator Austin said that he thought the minds of the delegates were still open, but that, as far as New York went, while they would not be averse to the countryside *around* the city, they would prefer a site *in* it, such as the X City plot, which Zeckendorf had not long before attempted to sell to the municipal authorities as a possible location for the headquarters. The important thing to bear in mind, Dr. Zuleta Angel put in, was that the Committee was scheduled to convene on Wednesday morning and reach a final decision then. In short, Rockefeller had two and a half days.

Rockefeller spent Monday thinking and conferring in his New York office, on the Fifty-sixth floor of the R.C.A. Building. He reached one conclusion—X City was out; it would undoubtedly be too expensive for him to swing alone. The most likely alternative, he decided, was Pocantico Hills, back of Tarrytown, where he, his father, and his four brothers all had homes, and on Tuesday morning he launched an eleventh-hour drive to round up enough land for a site there. He outlined his plan to his father at lunch, and to his brothers during the afternoon, and in every case he told them of Senator Austin's appraisal of the delegates' taste in the matter of an urban versus a suburban site, but added his belief that the Pocantico Hills area was worth at least a very good try. Each of the Rockefellers volunteered to give up a considerable portion of his individual holdings at Pocantico Hills, for a total of a thousand acres. Then, spreading out large-scale maps of the region on the cocoa-colored carpet of his office, Nelson hurriedly negotiated through his Westchester real-estate broker for options on two thousand acres adjoining the Rockefellers' properties, which would bring the complete parcel to three thousand acres. He now needed only to borrow a million dollars from his father for the purchase of the land covered by the options in order to wrap up the whole shebang. At the end of the day, Nelson called Austin to inform him that he had pretty well succeeded in acquiring a site in Westchester, but to his dismay, the Senator replied that he now thought the members of the Headquarters Committee would not be interested in any New York site that was not actually in the city. Gloomily, Nelson telephoned his father at seven o'clock on Tuesday evening, surrounded by an agitated group consisting of Harrison, Jamieson, Mrs. Louise Boyer, who is Nelson's assistant, and John Lockwood, one of the family's lawyers. Nelson told John D., Jr., how things stood, and then, as he listened to his father's comments, his face broke into a smile of astonished rapture. "Why, Pa!" he exclaimed. Cupping his hand over the mouthpiece, Nelson told the group around him, in a sort of whispered yodel, "He wants to know how much that site along the East River would cost! He wants to *give* it to them! . . . Wally, how much do you think it would take to get it?" Eight or eight and a half million, Harrison guessed. Upon receiving this information, Rockefeller *père* informed Rockefeller *fils* that if the river plot could be purchased, he was prepared to donate it to the United Nations, on one condition—that the United States waive the federal gift tax. (John D., Jr., presumably had in mind a rankling experience in the twenties, when he gave the League of Nations two million dollars for a library in Geneva and was held up for a gift tax of more than a third of a million by the United States government—a bite that rather took the joy out of his philanthropy.)

After the initial wave of exultation had subsided, Nelson and his cohorts deployed for action. Before the separate clearances with the city, county, state, and federal governments could be tackled, one piece of business, on which everything else hinged, had to be taken care of: An option had to be obtained on the river site, which consisted of seventeen acres between Forty-second and Forty-eighth Streets, and First Avenue and the East River, from Zeckendorf's firm of Webb & Knapp. Harrison was nominated for the job. He was the logical candidate, for he knew all about the site from having worked on it at the time Zeckendorf was planning to build X City there. The first step, therefore, was to find Zeckendorf. After an hour of putting in phone calls to various likely places, Harrison finally traced him to the Monte Carlo, a night club on the northeast corner of Madison Avenue and Fifty-fourth Street that was one of the odder properties controlled by Webb & Knapp. Zeckendorf told Harrison to come on over.

It was ten o'clock when Harrison arrived at the Monte Carlo, the pocket of his jacket bulging with a block-by-block map of the site. "I tried to assume an air of nonchalance, but I couldn't make it," Harrison recalls. "Did you ever see that Disney movie called 'Saludos Amigos'—the part where Donald Duck gets stuck high up in the Altiplano of the Andes? The air is so thin that Donald's heart is shown plunging a foot and a half out of his body every time it beats. Well, my heart was thumping just like that." Harrison found Zeckendorf in a private dining room at the rear of the club, attending a gala birthday party that was being given for one of his partners, Henry Sears. Harrison and Zeckendorf adjourned to the club's private office.

"You know that site on the river?" Harrison remembers saying, without any warmup whatsoever. "I want you to give me an option on it for the U.N."

"*Is* it for the U.N.?" Zeckendorf asked.

"Yes, it's for the U.N., and for nothing else," Harrison replied. "I'm not committing myself any further—about who I'm representing, or anything."

"O.K.," Zeckendorf said, without

hesitation. "I'll give you an option on it for eight and a half million."

Harrison said that this would be satisfactory, at which Zeckendorf, after consulting briefly with Sears, stretched Harrison's map out on the desk and, after outlining the six blocks involved in the site with his pen, wrote at the top:

$8,500,000 = East side of 1st Ave., 42nd to 43rd—Sq. Block 43-44 + 44-45 1st Ave. to East River + Sq. Block 46-47 NE Cor. 47 and 1st Ave. + 100 × 100 North Side 47th at Consolidated Garage $8,500,000, to United Nations only.

On a side margin of the map he wrote an additional note: "$8,500,000 to U.N. Dec. 10 for 30 days," and then both he and Sears signed their names.

Suppressing an impulse to grab the telephone on the desk and report the good news then and there to the group that was sweating it out in Nelson Rockefeller's office, Harrison tucked the map back in his pocket and walked out into the December night and over to the St. Regis Hotel, where he dialled his associates from a pay station in the lobby. "Nelson told me to pick up a bottle of champagne," he recalls. "He said a celebration was in order. Well, I fished in my pockets when I got out of the booth and found I had only a dollar and eleven cents on me. That struck me as funny as hell. Here's a guy who's just closed a deal for eight and a half million dollars and he hasn't got enough dough to buy a dozen bottles of Moxie."

In the end, the party got its champagne—two quarts of it—by sending out to "21." They polished off a quart (the other is still aging commemoratively in a pantry adjacent to Rockefeller's office) and then got down to business again. In one corner of the room, Lockwood, the lawyer, studied Zeckendorf's scrawled notations on the map and, after an hour's pondering, solemnly declared that he thought it would hold up as a valid option. In the meantime—it had become Wednesday by then—a number of telephone calls were put through. One was to Robert Moses, who agreed to see Mayor O'Dwyer the first thing that morning about getting the city to cede its rights to the streets, the river bulkheads, and various strips of land it controlled within the site. Another call was to Senator Austin, who was staying at the Pennsylvania Hotel, now the Statler. Austin is not particularly noted as a man of rapid action, but on this occasion he performed like an Ohio State scatback. He called Washington, awakened the general counsel of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, and obtained his substantial opinion that the government would exempt John D., Jr., from paying a gift tax if the United Nations accepted his offer. Later that morning, at about eight, while Moses was on his way to see Mayor O'Dwyer and Lockwood was calling Albany to negotiate clearances with the state authorities, Nelson Rockefeller—after breakfasting with his father—picked up Harrison and they went up to the Harkness Pavilion of the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, where Dr. Zuleta Angel, who was in poor health, had spent the night. They informed him of their last-minute entry in the competition.

At a meeting of the Headquarters Committee at Lake Success at ten o'clock that Wednesday morning, Dr. Zuleta Angel recognized Senator Austin, and the Senator made a dramatic announcement of the Rockefeller offer. Before adjourning, in a flurry of excitement, the Headquarters Committee instructed a subcommittee to inspect the land in question that afternoon. The next morning, following an enthusiastic report by the subcommittee, the Headquarters Committee voted, thirty-three to seven, to draft a resolution recommending that the General Assembly, then in session, accept the gift. Two days later, on Saturday, December 14th, the General Assembly voted, forty-six to seven, to adopt the resolution. "When it was all over, and we had won, I think we saw for the first time why we'd been successful," Harrison says. "It was very simple, really. The delegates had wanted New York all along."

SOME three weeks later, on January 2, 1947, Secretary-General Lie appointed Harrison director of planning for the United Nations Permanent Headquarters. "Harrison was only one of a number of architects who were under consideration," a veteran United Nations official stated recently. "There was some talk at the time that he went with the deal—that he was given the appointment because of his connection with the Rockefellers. That isn't so. The Secretary-General solicited recommendations from many sources. He decided on the basis of these recommendations that Harrison was the architect best qualified for the post. Harrison knew a great deal about the site, he was well versed in the special problems of building in New York, and he had had experience working with governmental officials and with men from foreign countries. In fact, he was uniquely qualified."

Harrison and Lie got together in mid-January for the first of innumerable meetings they were to hold during the nearly six years it took to design and build the headquarters. Routine matters, such as the chain of command (Harrison would report directly to Lie or to Byron Price, an Assistant Secretary-General) and Harrison's salary (the same as that of the head of any large department of the U.N.—twelve thousand dollars a year, plus another six thousand to help out on income taxes), were quickly disposed of. Then came the delicate matter of how to select the architects who would design the buildings, and in this Harrison and Lie were guided by the knowledge that the old League of Nations had got off to a woefully bad start when, in seeking a design for its Geneva headquarters, it held a competition open to architects from all its member countries, failed to reach a clear-cut decision as to the winner, and, in the course of seven years of wrangling, managed to affront individuals and nations alike in wholesale lots before it at last erected a building that no one was happy about. "Lie and I tried to make the machinery as simple and foolproof as possible," Harrison says. "We decided we'd have an international board of design that would collaborate on drawing up plans for the headquarters buildings. First off, we sent notices to all the member countries of the U.N., inviting them to nominate architects to serve on the board. In a few cases—like Soilleux, from Australia, I remember, and Liang, from China—when we felt we didn't know enough about the men who were nominated, we asked them to submit samples of their work. Then the question was how many members the board should have. We finally figured that we'd need about ten, to take care of all the areas that we thought ought to be represented—somebody from Western Europe, somebody from Eastern Europe, somebody from Scandinavia, at least one from the British Commonwealth, one from South America, one from the Far East, and so on. We picked the members of the board partly for their talent and partly for geographical and political considerations. We couldn't pick Alvar Aalto, who's a wonderful architect, because Finland wasn't a member of the U.N. We had to pass up Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius, because they were too closely identified with prewar Germany. The sixty-four-dollar question was whether

or not we should pick Le Corbusier. When you have to deal with matters of opinion and problems of personality—and, you may be sure, Le Corbusier is a man who can contribute plenty of both—it complicates the job. A good many people strongly advised against having him. On the other hand, there were some good reasons why we *should* have him—he was a great architect, of course, and besides he'd been given such a dirty deal in that League of Nations competition when his plan, although it was the choice of the majority of the judges, was finally thrown out on the absurd technicality that it had been drawn up with the wrong kind of ink. When all was said and done, we decided Corbu was better in than out." In addition to Le Corbusier, who, of course, represented France, the board was made up of G. A. Soilleux, of Australia; Gaston Brunfaut, of Belgium; Oscar Niemeyer, of Brazil; Ernest Cormier, of Canada; Ssu-ch'eng Liang, of China; Sven Markelius, of Sweden; N. D. Bassov, of Russia; Howard Robertson, of Great Britain; and Julio Vilamajó, of Uruguay. To supplement this group, seven special consultants were later added: Josef Havlíček, of Czechoslovakia; Vladimir Bodiansky, of France; John Antoniades, of Greece; Matthew Nowicki, of Poland; Peter Noskov, of Russia; Hugh Ferriss, of the United States; and Ernest Weissmann, of Yugoslavia. "Two-thirds of the board turned out to be marvellous architects," Harrison says. "The other third were good architects."

The first of the architects arrived in New York in early March—Robertson, a methodical-minded, well-tailored Londoner with a solid air of affability; Liang, who was an archeologist at heart and was overwhelmed by the newness of New York; Bassov, a stocky, middle-aged Russian engineer-architect, who had made his reputation during the war, when he was entrusted with relocating his nation's heavy industry east of the Urals; and Le Corbusier, crisp, high-pitched, and garrulous as a blue jay, his lean face dominated by thick-bowed, heavy-lensed spectacles—and the others trickled in, one at a time, during the next three or four weeks. Meanwhile, a group of architects from Harrison's office, headed by Harmon Goldstone, Abel Sorensen, and George Dudley, had started developing a "program," which is what architects call the documented study they make to determine the space and facilities a proposed building will need in order to fulfill its specified functions. Harrison's men interviewed dozens of Secretariat officials and members of the General Assembly, and then converted their mass of information into architectural facts and figures; for example, estimating that in time as many as 5,265 people might be employed in the various divisions and departments of the Secretariat, they came to the conclusion that the building to house it would require 439,595 square feet of office space, 25,033 square feet of meeting rooms, and 351,483 square feet for "other services." The program, printed in English and French, made everything as plain as day from an architect's point of view, and Harrison says he believes it helped put everybody in a hopeful frame of mind. In any event, the members of the board were in a conspicuously amiable mood when they began exchanging ideas at their first regular meeting, held early in April in the Headquarters Planning Office, which Harrison had set up on the twenty-seventh floor of the R.K.O. Building. Harrison picked this midtown location because he thought it would be a good plan for the board to be physically separated from the other activities of the United Nations, at Lake Success, and therefore less exposed to any possible oblique political pressures.

After studying the program, the board voted unanimously in favor of putting up three buildings—one for the General Assembly, one to house the Secretariat, and one for conferences of the various councils and committees. From the beginning, the Secretariat Building was visualized by practically everybody as a skyscraper, since no smaller structure could provide the needed office space and still leave enough room on the site for walks, grass, and trees. The amiability of the visiting architects visibly increased as they contemplated this obvious need for at least one skyscraper, since, as they were not reluctant to admit, they had come to New York with the hope of getting a crack at designing a real American cloud-buster—an opportunity none of them had ever had back home, and quite possibly never would have. To familiarize them with the problems of building skyscrapers, Harrison appointed six American engineers and three American architects to serve as technical consultants. However, since these consultants popped in only when they were asked to and since few of the board members had been able to arrange to stay in New York for more than two or three weeks at a time—incoming architects were always bumping into outgoing ones at Idlewild—the group that collected each morning in the planning office usually was small, averaging, perhaps, eight or nine men. Their workroom was an orthodox office, about forty feet by thirty, with four cubbyholes along one wall, to which members could repair whenever they wanted a little privacy. The board met around a table in the center of the room—it nearly always held plasticine models of various projected designs—and traded their views in a mixture of French and English. All of them except Bassov could speak at least one of these languages. Since no one else spoke Russian, Bassov did the best he could with an interpreter and what little English he was able to pick up as he went along. When he liked an idea, he said so with a brusque "Okay;" when he didn't, his response was an explosive "Nokay." At lunchtime, the members took turns escorting their colleagues to restaurants that specialized in their native cooking. "Brunfaut, the Belgian, preferred to eat at the Brussels," Harrison recalls. "He knew the proprietor. And Havlíček took us all to Lüchow's when a new kind of Czechoslovakian beer came in. Mostly, though, they dug up wonderful little spots I'd never even heard of in all the years I'd spent in New York. I've never eaten better." The afternoons had no set pattern; some of the members rambled about the city studying skyscrapers at first hand, some went to their hotel rooms to work in private, and others returned to the planning office and worked there. In the evenings, most of the members visited with countrymen of theirs or went out on the town.

Under no circumstances were the members at any time permitted to enter the drafting room, which was next door to their workroom. The drafting room, where the rough sketches that were approved by the board were translated into working designs, was manned by a staff of draftsmen, designers, and modellers under the direction of Abramovitz, who

had been made Harrison's deputy director of planning. "It's never a picnic when several creative minds are brought together to work on one project," Abramovitz says. "The rivalry for individual credit is always hovering over things. It can be ruinous. We were determined that the U.N. was going to represent an authentic group effort. That was the reason Wally declared the drafting room out-of-bounds—to prevent any member from getting his own idea drawn up into one of the plans before the rest of the members had a chance to pass on it. All ideas went into one common pot. All sketches were unsigned. That way, everything that was sent to the drafting room came from the group as a whole."

During the first two months, the board of design chugged along at a steady clip. "It was an exhilarating experience," Robertson, the British member, has since said. "When we started, each of us had his own pet idea of what the whole project or some part of it should look like. Liang proposed that the Secretariat be built on an axis running due east and west. The important buildings in China had always been built that way, he told us. It insured good luck. Liang also thought the entire site should be enclosed by a wall. Antoniades couldn't see any virtue in a wall. He preferred a continuous colonnade. You see, a good many of our concepts were quite atavistic. I was the courtyard fiend, which was proper for an Englishman, I suppose. Cormier, the Canadian, was for the conservative, solid, Anglo-French approach. And Le Corbusier, of course, was for Le Corbusier. He wanted the headquarters group to be one gigantic terraced block raised on stilts, or *pilotis*—Corbu's trademark. Bassov detested stilts. 'Chicken legs!' he'd snort. 'Nokay!' The design *he* had in mind was something like that of a power plant. That's how it went. But all of us gradually subdued our personal vanities and gave up the preconceived visions we'd come with, and as the project took shape the feeling of group unity grew. This was very noticeable to me. I went back to England for a couple of weeks, and when I returned I found the members of the board had knitted together into a sort of architectural jury. Each individual was still expected to express himself without reservation, but he was also expected to abide by the group verdict, and not go into any tantrums. Harrison was what you might call the foreman of the jury. The important thing to bear in mind is that Wally Harrison never submitted a design of his own. That's what made Wally's position so strong."

In late April, a mild crisis occurred. Some of the delegates, with Le Corbusier as their self-appointed spokesman, favored having all the lounges and the committee and council rooms in the Conference Building on one floor, while the rest favored having them on two floors, one right above the other, to make everything more compact. The debate reached its climax when Le Corbusier read a prepared statement consisting of thirty-six points. A number of these supported his single-level thesis, but some of the members found others weirdly irrelevant, such as Point 6: "I was sent by the French to defend the ideas of modern architecture and am responsible to the world at large for (a) undisputed function and (b) certain beauty," and Point 31: "Architectural splendor comes from the great books." In essence, Le Corbusier's statement amounted to a request for a vote on the two schemes. Harrison answered it at the next meeting. "There can be a decision by a vote, or I can make the decision," he told the members. "I have explained the difficulty of a vote: After a vote, you have the winners and the losers. If I make the decision, I am the only loser." He then recommended further study of the problem, but when the stalemate continued and there seemed no other solution, he ruled in favor of the two-level scheme, on the ground that while it was a little less beautiful, it would provide a little more convenience. It was the only time that Harrison ever exercised the final authority that was his as chairman of the board.

This brief squall over, the members quickly pushed ahead again, and in mid-May, less than three months after the start of the deliberations, a final plan was unanimously agreed upon—a feat of collaborative international design comparable to the four-minute mile. The plan was then presented to the Headquarters Advisory Committee of the General Assembly which unanimously approved it on May 21st. In November, the General Assembly formally accepted the plan, and excavation of the site was started on September 14, 1948. Perhaps the most significant, or at any rate the most exuberant, footnote to the life and times of the board of design was a five-hundred-word statement, entitled "A Declaration," that Le Corbusier released to the press shortly before it was disbanded. "A wonderful result has been achieved and one that is worth noting: we are all of the same opinion," it read, in part. "To those outside who question us we can reply: we are united, we are a team, the World Team of the United Nations laying down the plans of world architecture. . . . We are a homogeneous block. There are no names attached to this work. . . . Each of us can be legitimately proud of having been called upon to work in this team, and that should be sufficient for us." It *was* sufficient for Le Corbusier for a time, but a year later, with his rambunctious ego once again in the ascendant, he began claiming credit for the whole plan, and was miffed when officials of the United Nations would not arrange a press conference at which he could elaborate on this theme. He had, however, in the opinion of his colleagues on the board, made a considerable contribution, of which, in his own words, he could be legitimately proud.

ON the southwestern corner of the United Nations site, near the junction of First Avenue and Forty-second Street, there stood, and still stands, a six-story concrete building of no particular architectural distinction that was nearing completion at the time the U.N. acquired the site and was originally intended to provide office space for the New York City Housing Authority. During their deliberations in the spring of 1947, the members of the board of design briefly discussed the question of whether to raze this brand-new building, which would have to be bought from the city in any event, or try to work it into the scheme of things as best they could. They ended up by tossing the problem into Harrison's lap. His decision was to keep it. Nowadays, if the subject of this stepchild, which is currently serving as the United Nations library, happens to come up, Harrison is likely to frown and to confess that he has concluded it was a mistake to leave the building standing; he considers it a jarring note in the otherwise architecturally harmonious headquarters. Actually, at the time Harrison decided not to raze the building, he could hardly have decided otherwise, for the problem arose just when Secretary-General Lie was diligently paring his proposed budget for the headquarters, in an effort to persuade Congress to lend the U.N. the money to build it. In the course of three fruitless months of trying to round up funds, during which he had been turned down cold by the International Bank, Lie had already appealed once to Congress for eighty-five million

dollars—and had met with no success; now he was asking for only sixty-five million, and on August 11th, Congress granted the loan. The U.N. had to pay the City of New York about a million and a half for the Housing Authority Building, and Harrison felt that the additional money that would be needed to tear it down could be better spent elsewhere. The building served for some time as a base of operations for the Headquarters Planning Office and, as Harrison frequently points out, whatever its architectural shortcomings, it was ideal for this purpose, since it was not only right on the site but, unlike any other available building that would have provided equal facilities, remarkably handy to several restaurants on or near Second Avenue, such as the Imperiale, Colombo's, and the Palm, where, he finds, the easygoing atmosphere does wonders for a man whose head is too full of girders, spandrels, beams, and the ultimate failing point of steel.

Lie engaged Harrison & Abramovitz to convert the international board's plans into drawings for the contractors—a choice that was far from unexpected, since the firm was already so closely linked to the project. This put Harrison, the director of planning, in the bizarre position of being the client of Harrison, of Harrison & Abramovitz. "He was very tough on himself," H. L. McLeod, who headed the finance department of the Headquarters Planning Office, said later. "An architectural firm doing a job such as Harrison and Abramovitz did for the U.N. buildings would ordinarily charge a fee of several million dollars. Harrison & Abramovitz insisted on doing the job for just cost plus the actual overhead. They didn't make a cent of profit."

If there was any one day during the construction of the Headquarters that stood out as crucial for Harrison and his staff, it was the twenty-fifth of November, 1950. Around nine o'clock on the morning of that day—a Saturday—a hurricane blew into the New York area from the southeast and ripped full force up the East River. Harrison raced from his home on Fifth Avenue, near Sixty-fourth Street, to the half-finished Secretariat. He was soon joined there by three other members of his staff who were deeply involved in the project—McLeod, Glenn E. Bennett, and James A. Dawson—and by Byron Price, the Assistant Secretary-General who was working with the Headquarters Planning Office. "It was a real storm," Dawson has since said. "About thirty yards in front of the Secretariat stood a platform used for mixing concrete. It was around twelve feet by twenty, and made of two-inch planks. Well, the hurricane lifted that platform up out of the mud and right into the air like a toy, and almost tossed it against the building. It dropped a couple of yards short of where we were standing, right at the entrance. A little later, Harrison and Price and the rest of us went up on the roof to see if we could measure the sway. We didn't have a level with us, so we used the crudest of all measuring devices; we dropped a paper match into a puddle of water and watched how much it moved—really the same as the bubble-in-water principle. By our computations, the Secretariat was performing beautifully; she wasn't swaying any more than three-quarters of an inch. We doubled the figure, to be on the safe side, but that's still darn good, you know." Harrison, who was also worried about how the vast expanse of glass on the Secretariat's east side would hold up (it did), remained at the site until well after dark, when the storm finally blew itself out. "It was a pretty rough day for me," he said later. "Every time you get a building up, there's always one day when the full consciousness of your responsibility as an architect hits you. It's the day when the building has to work. This was it."

The Secretariat was finished first, then the Conference Building, and, finally, the General Assembly. In the summer of 1950, when the last two buildings were still far from completed, Harrison and his staff suddenly found themselves faced with the problem of inflation resulting from the outbreak of war in Korea. Two years earlier, in lining up its sources of construction materials, the Headquarters Planning Office had contracted to buy its structural steel from the American Bridge Division of the United States Steel Corporation, and Benjamin Fairless, the corporation's president, had agreed to give the United Nations "preferential treatment." Delivery dates on steel at that time were ordinarily from twelve to sixteen months after the receipt of an order, but Fairless guaranteed Harrison delivery within six months. When the war in Korea began, and steel became even harder to get than before, Fairless stood by his guarantee, and most of the other companies supplying materials to the United Nations came through in the same manner, but the cost of steel and other building materials rose sharply—an average of around twenty per cent—and this threw the closely figured budget of the Headquarters Planning Office badly out of kilter. Lie succeeded in negotiating an additional loan of three million dollars from Congress, but from there on it was up to Harrison to scale down the original plans as best he could to complete the project without exceeding the total appropriation of sixty-eight million dollars. This meant some fairly drastic changes. Four committee rooms were eliminated from the Conference Building, and the General Assembly was redesigned no fewer than nine times, each design being more economical than the one before. As originally conceived, the General Assembly was to have been a thin-waisted structure with an assembly hall at either end; now one of the two halls had to be abandoned, a lounge area for the delegates was chopped in half, the height of the ceiling of the remaining hall was dropped fifteen feet, and the length of the north lobby was diminished by some twenty feet—a loss that, in Harrison's eyes, severely impaired the looks of the entrance. All along the line, less expensive materials were substituted for the ones specified in the early plans—terrazzo and carpeting for marble flooring, fabric for wood on the walls of several committee rooms, marbleized glass for marble, and so on. "Wally was very ingenious about it all," Michael Harris, a member of Harrison's executive staff, said later. "For instance, there was the matter of some columns in the lobby of the Assembly. They were to be made of concrete, and we'd been planning to cover them with plaster instead of the marble facing originally called for. When Wally saw how the columns shaped up in concrete, he told us, 'Forget the plaster. We can save a little dough here. We'll just paint the concrete.'"

In October, 1952, four years and one month after construction began, the General Assembly Building was completed and the job was done. Counting the funds set aside for the landscaping of the site, the total cost had been sixty-seven million five hundred thousand dollars.

AROUND nine o'clock one Monday morning early this fall, Harrison arrived in town from his country place at Huntington, Long Island, and made for his office, in Rockefeller Center, in a state of high good humor. He had just spent the kind of weekend he thrives on. At Huntington, he had read a mystery by Ellery Queen, one of his favorite contemporary writers, and hal-

anced this with some poems by Dylan Thomas, whose rich, tumbling language fascinates him. He had enjoyed a first-class argument on the future shape of the City of New York with one of his favorite conversational sparring partners, Robert Moses, who has a place in nearby Babylon. On Saturday evening, he and Mrs. Harrison had entertained a fairly large group at dinner, and during the meal he had instigated the sending of a cablegram to Fernand Léger—whose professed Communism none of his old associates take very seriously—congratulating him on the opening of a new exhibition and signed "Your capitalist friends." In addition, Harrison had worked for some time on an abstract painting he has been trying to finish for two years, pruned some fruit trees on his property, and put in three reviving hours sketching a bright, lively design for a new combination office building and opera house that may or may not go up someday on Broadway at Sixty-fourth Street.

Upon reaching his office, Harrison whipped through his mail in ten minutes, spent a half hour cleaning out a closet with Vinnie, the firm's general factotum, and went over his sketches for the opera house with Abramovitz, and then the two partners discussed plans for an office building that the Commercial Investment Trust expects to erect on Madison Avenue, between Fifty-ninth and Sixtieth Streets. Presently, a young architect from the Middle West arrived to keep an appointment with Harrison, and in the ensuing chitchat it developed that the visitor had not yet seen the United Nations Headquarters. Harrison rarely visits the United Nations these days unless some maintenance problem there calls for his attention or he wants to talk over with Lie's successor, Dag Hammarskjöld, the touchy business of accepting or rejecting gifts of art proffered by member nations, but on this morning he impulsively offered to take the young man over and show him around. The offer being eagerly accepted, Harrison slapped on a narrow-brimmed brown felt hat he once picked up in Oslo, and the two men headed for the street, where Harrison hailed a taxi. "The United Nations Headquarters, skipper," he said to the driver, who nodded and swung into the stream of traffic. As the cab made its way across town, Harrison said he felt that New York needed a club to supplement the present Architectural League by providing a comfortable, natural gathering place for painters, sculptors, and architects, as the Café de Flore does in Paris, and then turned to discuss the increasingly important role that he believes optics will play in the architecture of the future. "Since Cézanne, painters have studied every possible method of intensifying the human being's reaction to the forms depicted on flat surfaces," he said. "In architecture, we're dealing with the same problem. What is the effect on the little guy when he looks at a building, or walks through it, or lives in it? How do we intensify his visual experience by simplifying form and color? No architect of the future will be any good unless he's a painter and a sculptor, too."

When the two men reached the Headquarters site, Harrison took his companion for a stroll around the grounds. "We were talking about optics," he said. "Well, see that little break up there?" He pointed to the top of the Secretariat, where the marble framing along the sides is slightly recessed. "We did that to pull the building in at the top. You know how the Greeks and Romans used to build their walls slanting inward, so that the buildings wouldn't look top-heavy? We couldn't do that here, of course—the Secretariat is too high—so we stepped in those sides instead." Harrison turned, and his eye fell on the old New York City Housing Authority Building that is now the library. He sighed. "That was sure a mistake, leaving that building up," he said. "It doesn't fit at all. But it's a complicated story, and anyway it's too late now." A few yards farther on, he came to a sudden halt. "The corner of that neck over there," he said, waving a hand toward the narrow, rectangular passageway that connects the General Assembly with the Conference Building. "You've probably heard a hundred and one criticisms of these Headquarters buildings, but somehow no one has ever jumped on that neck. I don't know how they missed it. It's not right—not right at all." The two men entered the Secretariat Building, and Harrison led the way down a back staircase. "If anyone was looking for something to criticize, that neck is certainly lousy," he said as he guided his companion into a subbasement, two stories below street level, where a battery of clerks were sorting mail. "This ceiling should have been at least a foot higher, too," he continued in a mournful tone. "None of us realized that those overhead pipes would take up so much space. It doesn't give the guys enough room."

The tour moved on briskly—a brief examination of the twenty-third floor, which is a typical service floor, housing elevator, air-conditioning, and ventilating machinery, on to several office floors, then earthward by elevator and escalator and into the Conference Building, with its three council chambers, its numerous committee rooms and lounges, and its two restaurants, and finally, via the offensive neck, to the General Assembly Building. For the most part, Harrison was content to point out things that "we might have done better," but he was openly pleased when the young architect expressed his admiration for certain features of the buildings, such as the movable partitions in the Secretariat, which make it possible to rearrange the whole layout of a floor in a couple of days, and the parabolic sweep of the walls of the Assembly Hall, which gives an effect of intimacy to a domed auditorium that is only a little smaller than the Radio City Music Hall.

At the end of the tour, Harrison and his companion stood at the curb on First Avenue, waiting for a cab. "There'll be one along in a minute," Harrison said. "Six years ago, there wouldn't have been one in half an hour in this part of town. I don't suppose you noticed when we got in the taxi coming over that the driver knew right away where the United Nations was. Probably seemed to you the most natural thing in the world. But, silly as it may sound, that always makes me feel good—I mean the fact that the cabdrivers all know now where the United Nations is. Hell, back in '48, when we were starting the U.N., none of them knew what we were talking about."

—HERBERT WARREN WIND

(This is the last of three articles on Mr. Harrison.)

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Dr. Frank Willard Libby, the newly-appointed scientist member of the Atomic Energy Commission, is known as the inventor of the "atomic time clock," a device by which he has been able to determine the ages of objects up to 20,000 years old. This device will be used in Egypt as well. . . .

Thus it will be possible to determine the age of the mommies in Egypt.

—*Beirut (Lebanon) Star.*

The red-hot ones?

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NON-SEQUITUR DEPARTMENT

[*From the Springfield (Mass.) News*]

The custom of using mint sauce with lamb is very old as indicated by the following verse from a medieval era:

"Always have lobster sauce with salmon."

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Remarks:

Routed to you, at the DD/I's suggestion, is a profile sketch of Wallace Harrison who will be the architect for CIA's new building.

The DCI has seen this.

JR

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